

PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or* AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



May 2015

Vol. 120, No. 5

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

Reason versus Religion—I

Knowledge of the sciences covers, as it were, only part of our lives, but the knowledge which religion brings to us is eternal, as infinite as the truth it preaches. Claiming this superiority, religions have many times looked down, unfortunately, on all secular knowledge, and not only so, but many times have refused to be justified by the aid of secular knowledge. In consequence, all the world over there have been fights between secular knowledge and religious knowledge, the one claiming infallible authority as its guide, refusing to listen to anything that secular knowledge has to say on the point, the other, with its shining instrument of reason, wanting to cut to pieces everything religion could bring forward. This fight has been and is still waged in every country. Religions have been again and again defeated, and almost exterminated. The physical sciences are better equipped now than formerly, and religions have become less and less equipped. The man, whatever he may say in public, knows in the privacy of his heart that he can no more 'believe'. Believing certain things because an organized body of priests tell him to believe, believing because it is written in certain books, believing because his people like him to believe, the modern man knows to be impossible for him. There are, of course, a number of people who seem to acquiesce in the so-called popular faith, but we also know for certain that they do not think. This fight cannot last much longer



without breaking to pieces all the buildings of religion. The question is: Is there a way out? To put it in a more concrete form: Is religion to justify itself by the discoveries of reason, through which every other sciences justifies itself? Are the same methods of investigation which we apply to sciences and knowledge outside, to be applied to the science of Religion? In my opinion this must be so, and I am also of opinion that the sooner it is done the better. If a religion is destroyed by such investigations, it was then all the time useless, unworthy superstition; and the sooner it goes the better. I am thoroughly convinced that its destruction would be the best thing that could happen. All that is dross will be taken off, no doubt, but the essential parts of religion will emerge triumphant out of this investigation. Not only will it be made scientific—as scientific, at least as any of the conclusions of physics or chemistry—but will have greater strength, because physics or chemistry has no internal mandate to vouch for its truth, which religion has.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), 1.376–77.



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Circulation
Indrajit Sinha
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EDITORIAL OFFICE
Prabuddha Bharata
Advaita Ashrama
PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt Champawat · 262 524
Uttarakhand, India
Tel: 91 · 96909 98179
prabuddhabharata@gmail.com
pb@advaitaashrama.org

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mail@advaitaashrama.org

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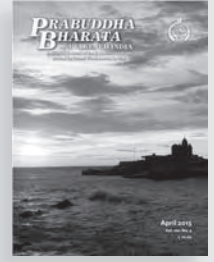
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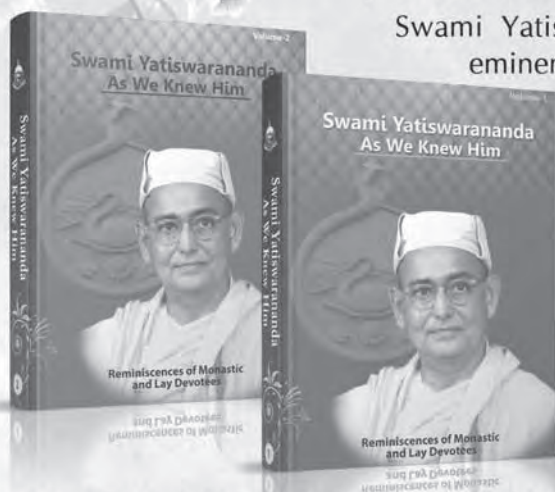
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May 2015
Vol. 120, No. 5

मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

अथ खल्वियं ब्रह्मविद्या सर्वोपनिषद्विद्या वा राजन्नस्माकं भगवता मैत्रिणाऽऽख्याताहं ते कथयिष्यामीति । अथापहतपाप्मानस्तिग्मतेजसा ऊर्ध्वरेतसो वालखिल्या इति श्रूयन्ते । अथ क्रतुं प्रजापतिमब्रुवन् । भगवन् शकटमिवाचेतनमिदं शरीरं कस्यैष खल्वीदृशो महिमाऽतीन्द्रियभूतस्य येनैतद्विधमेतच्चेतनवत् प्रतिष्ठापितं प्रचोदयिता वा अस्य यद् भगवन् वेत्सि तदस्माकं ब्रूहीति तान् होवाचेति ।

॥ २.३ ॥

Atha khalviyam brahmavidya sarvopanishad-vidya va rajannasmakam bhagavata maitrina'khyataham te kathayishyamiti. Athapahata-papmanas-tigma-tejasa urdhvaretaso valakhilya iti shruyante. Atha kratum prajapatim abruvan. Bhagavan shakatamivachetanamidam shariram kasyaisha khalvidrisho mahima'tindriyabhutasya yenaitad-vidham-etach-chetanavat pratishtapitam prachodayita va asya yad bhagavan vetsi tadasmakam bruhiti tan hovacheti.

(2.3)

Now, indeed, O King, this is the knowledge of Brahman and the knowledge of all the Upanishads as taught to us by revered Maitri. I will narrate it to you. Now we hear that the Valakhilyas were free from evil, of resplendent glory, and chaste. Now, they said to Kratu Prajapati, 'Sir, this body is like a cart without intelligence. Which supra-sensuous being possesses such power by which such a thing has been made intelligent, or in other words, who is its driver? Sir, tell us what you know.' Then he said to them.

(2.3)

THIS MONTH

We have been given some wonderful texts by our forefathers, people who wanted us to lead meaningful lives. These texts are often inaccessible because of their language, institutions they are associated with, or the ideologies they have come to symbolise. How to access the nuggets of wisdom hidden in these texts and practise them in our lives are dealt with in **The Manuals of Life**.

The tussle between faith and reason is as old as humanity. Religion needs not mere faith but also astute reason. One's faith is strengthened by reasoning. The need for having both faith and reason is emphasised by Swami Pavitrananda, former Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of New York. This is an edited transcript of a talk delivered in 1953.

Goddess Lakshmi has been always considered to be the Hindu goddess of prosperity. In **Lakshmi**, Alok Dutta, a litterateur, artist, and social activist from Kolkata, gives us a different interpretation of the form of this goddess that is famous in West Bengal.

The message of Sri Ramakrishna has reached various regions of the globe. Swami Vivekananda envisioned a monastery for women that would be managed and membered only by nuns. In the spirit of Swamiji's vision, **The Sri Sarada Devi Ashrama of South Africa** was born. Pravrajika Ishtaprana, the head of this ashrama, describes the origins of this monastery and its activities of prayer and service.

Ayurveda, the science of life, gives key insights into the holistic life of an individual, not

just one's physical health. In **The Diseases of Modern Life and the Ayurvedic Approach**, the Ayurvedic way to tackle present-day lifestyle diseases is discussed by Dr Bhaswati Bhattacharya, research scholar of Ayurveda at the Banaras Hindu University, clinical assistant professor of Family Medicine at Weill-Cornell Medical College, New York, and the founder-director of The Dinacharya Institute, New York.

In **Love for All**, the practice and teachings of love in the lives of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Chaitanya are compared by D K Sen, former director of the Geological Survey of India, Kolkata.

The coming of Indians including Swami Vivekananda to Freemasonry is discussed in the third instalment of **Masonic Vedanta** by Guy L Beck, a scholar, author, musician, educator, historian of religions, musicologist, a Fulbright-Nehru senior research fellow and visiting fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, Oxford University, UK, lecturer in Religious Studies and Asian Studies at Tulane University; and adjunct professor of Religious Studies at Loyola University, New Orleans.

In the sixth instalment of **Memory**, Swami Satyamayananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kanpur, explains retentive intelligence and the destruction of memory.

The way we perceive emotions is significantly influenced by the paradigm shift described in the book **How Do You Feel?** by A D (Bud) Craig, the Atkinson Research Scientist at the Barrow Neurological Institute, Phoenix. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

The Manuals of Life

Religion and spirituality are for the old. That is what the young generally think. They think that spirituality is a post-retirement plan; something which has to be enjoyed with the gratuity, provident fund, and pension that you get after retirement. This is not true. It is not only the fault of the youth that they think in this manner. Parents guard their children from anything even remotely religious or spiritual and encourage them to first get 'settled' in material life before starting a spiritual life.

All that a child learns from society, teachers, and parents, is an unwarranted and unconcealed abhorrence for religious and spiritual matters. They are at best seen as elaborations of a strait-jacketed and non-consequential thinking. The result is that the moment one sees a devotee, monastic, a place of worship, or a religious text, one tends to look away much like one would do on sighting garbage. Why so much aversion to matters spiritual? This is the outcome of years of unsettling an individual and making one insecure through what is supposed to be education and cultural grooming.

Contrary to popular perception, spirituality is something we need when we are in the middle of our life, not just at the end of it. It is what you need when you are in the heat of the moment, when you are juggling with alternatives, when you are at a loss what to do, when you want to take a road but are still standing perplexed at the crossroads. That is when you need spirituality. That is when you need to get a hold on yourself. Not on your puny self, the construct of

your body and mind, but on your true self that is beyond time, space, and causation. Imagine the endless possibilities that would open up if you were aware of this true personality of yours and when you realise that you cannot be limited

Spirituality is something we need when we are in the middle of our life, not just at the end of it. It is what you need when you are in the heat of the moment.

by anything, not just as a figure of speech, but literally, anything. That is when your life begins. And that cannot happen without contemplation, without some soul-searching, without putting behind your body and mind—essentially everything that you presently consider to be you.

How to accomplish this? How to know what is the best course to take when one is flooded with choices? When you purchase a computer, a car, a refrigerator, or any other appliance or equipment, it generally comes with a manual. This manual tells you how to handle the equipment—this instruction is meant for those who do not know much about machines—how to operate the equipment, and so on. It also tells you what to do when something goes wrong; it helps us troubleshoot. In practice, when we unpack an appliance or equipment, we hardly go through the manual. That manual gathers dust till the moment we cannot do something with that appliance or till we face some problems with it. That is when we search for the manual, for solutions to the problem at hand.


However, how nice it would have been if

we had read the manual beforehand and were prepared for such situations. As far as our life is concerned, we can be prepared. Through our traditional heritage we have been handed over such manuals, manuals of life by our predecessors, in the form of texts like the Bhagavadgita and the Upanishads. They teach us exactly what manuals of equipment teach us—they tell us what to do when things go wrong in our lives. They also teach us how to go about our lives in such a manner that no problems would arise in the first place.

But unfortunately, thanks to our wonderful education system, we keep all these manuals somewhere comfortably out of our reach, and then break our heads when some problem occurs in our life. Some of us try to commit suicide, some become mad, and some others get depressed and desolate. We need to remember that these manuals are to be used when we are alive, when we are battling with the crises of our lives. They are to be used by all—not just monastics, the believers of a particular creed, the religious, or the spiritual. These manuals have to be used by all human beings. This is probably why Sri Krishna told the Gita to Arjuna in the midst of the battlefield. It was not told in an ashrama. It was not told in a retreat. It shows us that it is when life is happening and when you are living it that you need these manuals.

What are we doing today with these manuals? We are relegating them to a secondary, tertiary, or worse, the last place in our lives' list of priorities because some shallow-minded people have decided that these texts are not conducive to life in society. Of course, this conclusion they have arrived at by not even reading the original text, a task beneath their great personalities! Some skewed translations, wrong interpretations, and hearsay have led these guardians of society to believe in the meaninglessness and uselessness of these timeless manuals. So much for wisdom!

The biggest hurdle in accessing these manuals is the religious colour they are given. To make these manuals available to the entire humanity, the first thing to be done is to look at them free from their religious connotations. These manuals are not as religious as we think and make them out to be. They were born in a setting and society not very different from that of today. By associating these texts with a particular religion, creed, or ideology, we are depriving the world from ideas that are universal and necessary for the well-being of any person. In the times we live in, there is a tremendous pressure on every person to perform in the limited sense of the term, particularly materially. This has led to a rampant increase in psychological illnesses. This is another area where the manuals of life can come handy as keys to a meaningful and peaceful life. The way out then is to dissociate these manuals from all religious, creedal, or ideological affiliations, and see them as texts written or conceived by wise people who had something to say to fellow humans. Only then will they serve their true purpose of showing us how to live our lives and also of troubleshooting it when the need arises.

The best way to learn from these manuals is to study these texts independently without resorting to any interpretation. Every word should be analysed and its meaning understood completely. Then, that meaning should be correlated with the present-day context. This should be done with the intention of practising the wisdom of these texts and not just for creating a theoretical framework. When the practical implications of the teachings are properly understood, a sincere attempt should be made to translate them into one's daily life. When these teachings are reflected in our lives, these manuals would have served their purpose and would have truly become the manuals of life. 

Reason, Faith, and Religion

Swami Pavitrananda

IS RELIGION TO JUSTIFY ITSELF by the discoveries of reason, through which every other science justifies itself? Are the same methods of investigation, which we apply to sciences and knowledge outside, to be applied to the science of Religion? In my opinion this must be so, and I am also of the opinion that the sooner it is done the better. If a religion is destroyed by such investigations, it was then all the time useless, unworthy superstition; and the sooner it goes the better. I am thoroughly convinced that its destruction would be the best thing that could happen. All that is dross will be taken off, no doubt, but the essential parts of religion will emerge triumphant out of this investigation. Not only will it be made scientific—as scientific, at least, as any of the conclusions of physics or chemistry—but will have greater strength, because physics or chemistry has no internal mandate to vouch for its truth, which religion has.¹

In selecting a title for this talk, 'Reason, Faith, and Religion', I purposely added 'religion', but it might better have been 'Realisation'. So long as religion is not realisation, so long as it is not an experience, it is simply groping in the dark. Religion must be realisation, real religion *is* realisation. Real religion begins when you have an experience, when it is as much a fact with you as any object of sense perception. So I said 'Reason, Faith, and Religion', which means realisation.

But, ordinary people in ordinary circumstances would say: 'Faith is religion. Faith is the only instrument of getting religion.' They

identify faith with religion, faith in a particular thing, particular book, particular prophet. In Bengal there is a school of religious thought, which says: 'You cannot get anywhere by discussion. Faith is the only thing needed; faith is

Religion must be realisation, real religion is realisation. Real religion begins when you have an experience, when it is as much a fact with you as any object of sense perception.

all.' They do not give any scope for reasoning, any scope for questioning. If you say anything to them which goes against their fundamental faith, they will be nettled, and they have a standard answer. They always repeat: 'You will get Krishna only through faith.' If you try to argue, you will never get anywhere, for that is their formula; they will simply repeat that.

By the way, it has been seen, if I may venture to make some generalisations, that whenever there is dualism, there is fear of any argument against it. Whenever there is any dualistic religion, they are afraid of any argument, any challenge. Not so for those who are monistic; read Acharya Shankara if you want to understand this. What hair-splitting discussion! He does not fear any argumentation; rather, his arguments are so sharp, and he uses such niceties, that his intellect would be the despair of modern intellects. It might be because from that high standpoint he could see all these things, and so he was not afraid of anything. He could find out where it fits.

But usually we find that those who are dualist have specific beliefs. There is no harm in having such beliefs, but usually we find they cannot stand any contradiction. They want to discourage all arguments, all doubting, and all questioning. They say: 'You cannot get Krishna if you come to discussions of belief. Just believe in these things.' Yes, some persons grow that way, but I would say that many persons face the graveyard of their spiritual life because they do not like to think.

You will have to make decisions on many occasions, and that is the only way to grow. You learn by your experience; you learn by your mistakes.

They become the victims of their own delusion, and also of any charlatan or fraudulent person. Not that all people with whom they come into contact are charlatans; I used a strong word. But in life you must have the cleverness to protect yourself, and the same thing is true in religious life also. You must know how to protect yourself even against the vagaries of your own mind. Otherwise, every hallucination will seem a vision to you; you will think that it is a religious experience, when after all it is a mental delusion.

And besides, there is the necessity for exercising your judgement. You will have to make decisions on many occasions, and that is the only way to grow. You learn by your experience; you learn by your mistakes. And even in the religious life, you have to find out many things for yourself; you have to discern what is right and what is wrong. It is said you must discern between the real and the unreal, between the true and the false. Here you exercise your reasoning power, your faculty of judgement. God has given us intellect; God has given us the power to think, for there is a great necessity for reasoning.

Of course, afterwards the mind becomes your

spiritual guide. Your mind becomes so evolved that whatever comes within it is correct and you can follow your intuition. But until then, you have to exercise your judgement. The Upanishads say that the religious person must be sharp in intellect; he must have a keen discerning faculty. Vedanta is bred of the strong in mind and keen in intellect, so that one can discern what is right and what is wrong.

Yes, there is the need for reasoning, but there are persons who are fortunate; their faith is enough for them. At once, their faith in something, and faith itself, is their protection. In spiritual life they go on the wings of faith, and they do not go astray; they do not deviate from the right path. Their faith is so genuine; their faith is so strong that it is itself a protection to them.

As the English poet said that blessed would be the day when joy and security are their own strength. Their faith is its own security; their faith is that strength. There are such cases. This is illustrated by many stories in every religion. Christ says: 'If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to the mountain, "Remove hence to yonder place"; and it shall remove.'²

When Jesus asked Peter to walk over the sea, Peter was afraid. And Jesus said, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' (14:31).

In our spiritual life also, we of little faith get afraid, but all persons do not. In some persons faith is very strong; it comes natural to them. Sri Ramakrishna would tell this story about Sri Ramachandra, who had to cross the ocean to Sri Lanka, the kingdom of Ravana, his enemy, by a bridge. But his devotee Hanuman could cross the ocean without the help of a bridge, because he had great faith in Sri Ramachandra.

It is said that a great devotee sent a person to cross a river on foot, and he said to him, 'I give you this slip of paper. Something is written on it, and that will be enough for you.' And as he

was going across, he was walking over the surface of the river, but in the middle of the river, the question arose in him: 'What is it? It is so efficacious. What is there written on the paper?' And he brought out the paper and looked at it. There was written the name of a deity. He said, 'Only this thing?' And at once he sank. So long as his faith was firm he was safe.

These things are said metaphorically. In our life also, so long as our faith is intact, we cross over the river of life without any difficulty.

There is another story which we read in India while we were children. There was a boy who had lost his father very early, and the poor mother brought him up against all odds. He had to go to school through a forest, and the boy was afraid as the mother could not give him any attendant. What could he do? The mother said: 'Think of God, think of Sri Krishna, and he will protect you.' The boy's faith was great, and every day he would go to school that way, talking and playing with Sri Krishna.

One day there was a big ceremony at the house of his teacher. The teacher had lost one of his parents, and there was the funeral ceremony at which many persons are fed, and he expected all his students to bring something for that occasion. The other students were children of rich parents, but this boy could not bring anything and he did not like to mention it to his mother; he knew that his mother was very poor. And because Sri Krishna, in the form of the boy Gopala, was protecting him in times of difficulty as he walked through the forest, he prayed to Gopala for saving him from this difficulty. Gopala gave him a tumbler of milk, and he brought it to his teacher.

The teacher had many other things, very important things, to look after and when he saw that the poor boy had brought him a tumbler containing something he did not take any notice

of it. Afterwards, the teacher saw that the tumbler fell down and the milk spilled, but somehow the milk went again into the tumbler. Surprised, he exclaimed: 'What! How could it be?'

And the boy said: 'Gopala gave it to me.'

The teacher asked: 'What do you mean? Where did you see him? In that forest?'

And the teacher went into the forest with that boy, who cried out, 'Gopala! Gopala!'

The answer came in a voice without form: 'I can appear before you, for you have faith, but not before your teacher who has no faith.'

This story illustrates how one can grow through simple faith. There is no other help in life. And when this faith becomes natural and genuine, it is a protection; it is a help; it is strength. We do not get much by our reasoning. Reason is a help; reason is an obstacle; but faith goes far ahead. Without any reasoning there have been cases where persons have become very great.

Sri Ramakrishna had a disciple who was quite innocent of the three R's; he did not know how to read and write. But through simple faith in his guru he got spiritual illumination. Afterwards, scholars and pundits would go to him for guidance, help, and strength.³ Once a person was reading before him a passage from the Upanishads where it is said that the soul is within the body, and that one should very carefully take it out as you take out the pith from the plant.

At once, the disciple got excited. He said: 'It is so true! It is so true!' One could easily see that it was his personal experience. He did not know Sanskrit; he did not know how to write; but through faith he got that knowledge. Faith works wonders.

There was another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, a doctor, Durga Charan Nag or Nag Mahashay. He had a scientific mind, but

afterwards he gave up his practice. One day during his last illness, Sri Ramakrishna told him that he would like to eat the *amalaki*, myrobalan fruit. That fruit was not available in that season, but this disciple had faith in the words of Ramakrishna. He 'thought that if the word *amalaki* came from the lips of the Master, then it must be available somewhere. Without saying anything, he left in search of the fruit. For two days he checked different gardens in the suburbs of Calcutta, and at last on the final day, he appeared before the Master with a few *amalaki* fruits.'⁴ And people were surprised.

You may explain it as a coincidence. Yes, you have the right to explain it that way. But see his tremendous faith; he believed that it must be available somewhere; and that faith sustained him in his spiritual life. That is the utility and the efficacy of faith.

But, at the same time, you should not ignore the great harm that is caused when you systematically try to inculcate that kind of faith in people who are not ready for it. Because people are not ready for it, you see much fanaticism; you see so much irreligion in the name of religion.

In our college, we read Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in old English, which seemed very sweet. There was a description of how the monks would go selling indulgences, selling redemption. And Chaucer, with his sly humour and wit, would give such a vivid picture of how, from Rome, the Pope would be selling indulgence. And many persons saw that was the practice of the day; they felt that by buying them they could get salvation in the afterlife.

Just see how these things happen. Some, such as Martin Luther, stood against these things. How could that be? It is absurd on the face of it. Of course, some minds have great faith, and by that faith they might be lifted up. But it could not be forced on all; on the face of it, it could

not be true. At least, it is difficult for a section of people to believe in these things.

Because you want faith, there was witch burning, there was the Inquisition. So many things happen because at the very start you give up your reason. At the very start you are told that by discussion, by reasoning, you do not get anything. As I said, when real faith is there, when the person who speaks is a person of faith, is a person of spiritual power, yes, then you can take things to be true.

Some time ago, I saw a play, a Christian play on the life of Christ. There it was shown that Christ said to his disciples, 'Go, and preach my message.' Afterwards, I was discussing this with another monk of our Order: 'Just see, Christ said that. Christ said, "Go and preach my doctrine." And at once they went. Where was the time for growth? They did not do any spiritual practice.'

But the swami with whom I was talking gave me a very beautiful answer. He said, 'Why? If Christ said these things, it would be efficacious.' That struck me. It is true. If you are fortunate to come into contact with such a person who can say, 'Be thou whole',⁵ whole you become. But it is not true for the ordinary person. Ordinary persons have to crawl up, and so one must be cautious.

So, when you stifle the reasoning power, it is fanaticism. I have seen terrible cases of such fanaticism in India. Truth is there in the message of the prophets, but not in the way that truth has been interpreted. I mean the fanaticism of some religious people in India. Some priests preach doctrines and create combustible fanaticism, which often results in a riot, a terrible savagery.

They act in the name of religion, but they have not been trained to think for themselves what is right. Even with ordinary acts of morality, they would not think to decide whether

they were right or wrong. They would think that a particular prophet said the last word as far as spirituality is concerned; believe in it or you die. So there have been some terrible cases of fanaticism. One should simply ask oneself: 'Is that religion?' But it is not religion. Nevertheless, that from which these things started is all right, but in the practice, there was something wrong.

An American disciple of Swami Vivekananda once told me something I enjoyed very much: 'As far as religion is concerned I bow to Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda, but so far as secular things are concerned I use my common sense.' I liked it so much; that is what should be done.

Unfortunately, we do not like to use our common sense. It is said there is nothing so uncommon as common sense. He told me that Swami Vivekananda was the only religious person he found having common sense. Swamiji's reasoning power was sharp, so he could speak boldly. His writings are full of reasoning, and therefore he can withstand the challenge of reason. Rather, his theme is built upon reason; you build up your life by reason and get everything, provided that you can direct your life in a proper way.

As I said, there is a need for reason. Sometimes your very doubting shows a religious mind; it shows you have vitality. Your doubt does not indicate that you lack religious spirit. On the contrary, it is an indication of your piety; it shows you have a virile mind. So don't take for granted that a man who questions religious things is irreligious. It might be just the opposite.

But even so, there may be overdoing of reason. There may be unreason in the name of reason. Usually, faith goes forward faster, but reason comes to help you in your life; reason is your second line of defence in spiritual life. When you conquer a country, there is an army to consolidate that country. Through faith, you conquer a

land in spiritual life, and reason comes to consolidate it.

However, in ordinary cases you go by faith, but doubt arises in your mind. Take it for granted that doubt comes in the life of every person, with rare exceptions. So when doubt comes, reason comes to help you, because your life has been built on reason.

'As far as religion is concerned I bow to Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda, but so far as secular things are concerned I use my common sense.'

But, reason has its abuses, and reason has its limitations. What is reason? Reason is limiting a thing by the human intellect. You feel that by reasoning, and a set of arguments, you will know everything, and that everything comes within the ambit of the human intellect. But how far will the human intellect go? How far, how much can we know with the intellect, and what happens? The difficulty arises because you believe in reason and you go astray; you destroy the things that have been built by faith.

Destructive reasoning is so confident that it does not see the other side of the issue. It is destructive reasoning. Why? Because you must take the help of crutches and props unless you are strong enough to walk. Not that you will always walk with crutches and props; there will come a time when you will outgrow them. And so it was a kind of destructive reasoning, not for a particular case, but in general. There is a class of people who will decry everything; they do not see the other side of the issue.

But, to judge a thing, you must have some prerequisite qualification. While I was at our monastery in India, I once read a beautiful article in an American magazine, the *Harper's Magazine*. The article said that ordinarily, a man

does not open his lips on a subject unless he has some preliminary knowledge in that field. But as far as religion is concerned, everybody is bold enough, confident enough, wise enough, to pass any judgement. A man becomes great in science, and he thinks he can talk on religion. A man becomes a great political power, and he thinks he can pass judgement on religion.

Reason must be sincere and conscientious. If you believe something to be true, you owe it to yourself to put it into practice. What you think is right you must put into practice.

This is not reasoning, since reasoning is not based on arrogance. In reasoning, there is humility, and a genuine yearning to find out the truth; it is not synonymous with arrogance. People say: 'I say these things. It is my opinion.' Well, have you any opinion at all? Have you got the qualifications to say that you have an opinion to pass on a work of art? You must have training to know whether music is good or bad. Similarly there is a need for training to pass judgement on religious things.

Moreover, reason must be sincere and conscientious. If you believe something to be true, you owe it to yourself to put it into practice. Yes, do anything you like if you think in your own way that there is no harm in it, but what you think to be right you must put into practice. Reasoning is not simply a parlour discussion; in that case it is intellectual dishonesty, it is hypocrisy. Find out what is right by your reasoning, and try to put that into practice. That is the utility of reason.

What we usually do, is to pass judgement on all sorts of things. We think we are wiser than anybody else in the world, that we have the right, the wisdom, to pass judgement because *I* believe it. That is abuse of reasoning. But if you put into practice what you think to be right, it will be a

spiritual discipline, and there will come a time when reason will develop into faith. You must be conscientious, truthful to yourself, and you must have intellectual honesty. The greatest harm that is done to you is to become dishonest to yourself. So, you see, simply by following the dictates of your reason, trying to put into practice what you consider to be right, you will develop faith; reason will develop into faith unconsciously.

But what is faith? Faith is belief in certain things; you believe it to be true, and through practice, through the spiritual application of the reasoning faculty, you get the result. It is not faith to believe in something which is not true; it is true, only you do not know it. Your faith has not become strong enough. But through practice, when you get some results, your faith grows within you in spite of yourself.

What do you do in college or the laboratory? You start, and when you get the result, your faith increases. This is true also in moral and spiritual life. Simply put into practice what you consider to be right and that will be enough for your spiritual life. Do not bother about spiritual books, sages, or saints. But there arises a difficulty: you cannot do that; ordinary human beings cannot do that. It is not so easy to put the dictates of reason into practice.

A tragic thing happened, even in the life of Swami Vivekananda for, as I said, everyone passes through a period of doubt and questioning. Before he came into contact with Sri Ramakrishna, he passed through that period. And he took the advice of a friend, a senior student. Afterwards, that student became a great philosopher, one of the foremost scholars in India. He is now dead. Swamiji went to him and he talked philosophically about things. That scholar friend said there is universal reason, and your reason must tally with that universal reason. Just follow that and your spiritual problems will be solved.

Afterwards, that scholar wrote his reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda as he saw him in his student life: 'He confessed that though his intellect was conquered by the universal, his heart owned the allegiance of the individual Ego and complained that a pale bloodless reason, sovereign *de jure* but not *de facto*, could not hold out arms to save him in the hour of temptation. He wanted to know if my philosophy could satisfy my senses, could mediate bodily, as it were, for the soul's deliverance; in short, he wanted a flesh and blood reality visible in form and glory; above all, he cried out for a hand to save, to uplift, to protect, a Shakti or power outside himself which could cure him of his impotence and cover his nothingness with glory—a Guru or master who by embodying perfection in the flesh would still the commotion in his soul.'⁶

And so, you cannot build up your life by reason alone. Much more is necessary; cold, pale reason cannot help you. Where will be the force? Where will be the dynamism? Reason without action is useless. Faith, unless it is virile, is useless as far as reason is concerned. It does not take you far; it does not give you the force; it does not give you strength. If a person has love for truth, faith in truth, he will reach everything, because he does not consider anything else. Other people, his friends and relatives, will think that he is mad. But he has faith in truth, and it gives him dynamism. It does not come easily through reason; it is due to faith.

In recent times Mahatma Gandhi had great faith in truth and non-violence, so he carried the entire country with him. It was not easy for him to do that. In the beginning, people laughed at him. When he came to India from South Africa, and spoke of these things, people simply scorned him. But his faith was tremendous and it began to gather strength. Those who came to scoff became his followers. It was not due to reason; it

was something else. He had faith in non-violence; he had faith in human love; he had faith in truth; and therefore, he would not keep anything secret in his life, even in politics. He would say everything because he had faith.

But this does not come from reason alone. Reason would say: 'This is true, but it is impractical.' But faith would reply: 'This is true. What *you* say is impractical.' Truth is more powerful than falsehood, but people will say it is practical to be false. But is it practical to be false? No. It is much more practical to be truthful. So here enters faith. But, as I said, if you are honest with yourself, your reason will usually ripen into faith, faith will give you a power to put things into practice, and as you practice, you will get more and more results.

The Bhagavadgita says that in spiritual life, the one thing needed is *shraddha*, faith. Sri Krishna says, '*Shraddhavan labhate jnanam*—the person of faith gets spiritual illumination.'⁷ Faith, faith in the prophets, faith in the teachings of saints and sages, and faith in the scriptures. These scriptures are not simply books, not simply printed words; they contain the spiritual experience of saints and sages, who are not frauds at least. We read these things, but we have no faith, and so it is said: '*Shraddhavan labhate jnanam*.' The person who has faith gets spiritual illumination.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that why is it that we read spiritual books, but it does not make any impression on our mind. You read the Bible, you read the Koran, you read other scriptures but you think they are only intellectual words. You forget that there is a great fire behind them because your faith has not developed. As I said, faith can be developed by simply putting reason into practice. When you have faith, then you find what a great power is behind the words which are printed in the scriptures. And,

as you have more and more faith, you grow in your spiritual life.

When your faith deepens, and a person comes and tries to put doubt in your mind, you will simply laugh, because you have seen the truth, you have tasted the truth.

And there comes time when you get more and more spiritual results, and your faith deepens. When your faith deepens, and a person comes and tries to put doubt in your mind, you will simply laugh, because you have seen the truth, you have tasted the truth. And the arguments of people from outside will seem like battles of children, because you have known something deeper. What will you say to a person who wants to pass judgement on a work of art without knowing anything about art? You can only answer with a smile. That will also happen when you have faith, when you have got some results. When you get results, you are on the way, and there will come a time when you will reach the end of your journey. You will get the ultimate reality; you will see the truth face to face, and all searching for the truth will end. So all your desires will be satisfied; there will be no more yearnings; you will have reached the end of your journey.

Everyone has faith, but what kind of faith do we have? Children have faith in the supreme power of their parents; they think their parents will protect them from anything. A young man has faith in himself, faith in his ambition. He thinks he can conquer the world. Grown up persons have faith in their bank accounts, in their relatives, in their friends. They think they can defy everything because they have these other things. But a person, when about to leave this world, requires another kind of faith.


Rabindranath Tagore—everything in him was poetic—wrote a poem, and said this poem should

be read at his obsequies. And the poem was a song. It was so beautiful that after he died people would sing it from one corner of Bengal to another. And these were his dying words, since he said they should be sung at his obsequies.

‘O my pilot, just start on your journey.

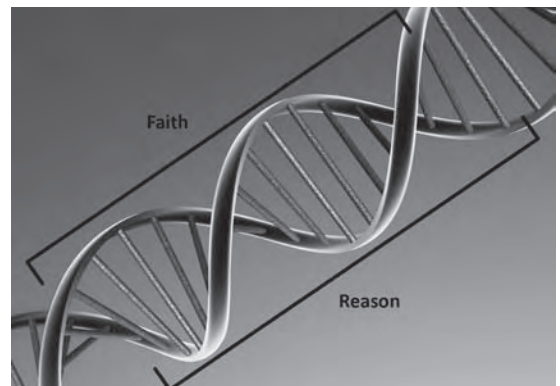
He’ll be my companion. There is one who will be my companion,

Who will be my light and guide in the great infinite of the unknown.’⁸

So it depends on what kind of faith you have. If you get such faith, that will be protection. Not only protection, you reach the end of all human problems. But that faith must be cultivated, must be nourished, before you can see it as fact. 

Notes and References

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2. Matthew 17:20.
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5. Mark 5:34.
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7. Gita, 4.39.
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Lakshmi

Alok Dutta

WOMEN GET FULFILMENT in their motherhood. Hence only the form of a mother is the form of the fulfilment of a woman. It is told that one cannot become a mother if one does not give birth to a child. And in many traditions, if a woman has not given birth to a child, she has no place in auspicious rituals or sacred spaces, she is kept away from rituals and observances, and even seeing her face is considered unholy. She stays far from the place of worship, hiding her face.

But, one who is worshipped in every Hindu household, in front of whom a lamp is lighted every evening and conch-shell blown, did that Lakshmi ever become a biological mother? Not that I know of. I asked my Sanskrit teacher, I asked the Puranic scholar Nrisimhaprasad Bhaduri, nobody has any knowledge of Lakshmi becoming a mother. There could be a Purana not known or not read by me or them. However, those in my acquaintance, who have been performing the worship of Lakshmi for many years, have not even the remote knowledge of Lakshmi being a mother. Then the question of the number of her children or their names does not even arise. This is what happens when religion becomes dependent on uneducated priests.

Yet who does not look upon Lakshmi as mother? Where can you find such perfection of motherhood? To bring up children with love and affection, protecting them, and taking their responsibility completely—where else can one see such an embodiment of overflowing fullness of motherhood? In her form, expressions,

behaviour—of course, only from so much that we can gather from grandmother-stories—we get drenched in the more than one hundred per cent flow of her compassionate love. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was also like this.

Through her form, Mother Lakshmi appears to be within our reach. Her form is common and familiar like that of an ordinary mother of any house.

Through her form, Mother Lakshmi appears to be within our reach. Her form is common and familiar like that of an ordinary mother of any house. She does not have any additional characteristics like ten hands, four hands, or three eyes as do Durga, Kali, or other gods and goddesses. She is our mother with two hands and two eyes. There is nothing unnatural in her skin colour too. She is not like other goddesses like Saraswati, who is extremely fair, or Kali, who is completely black. She is very natural, too natural a mother. Kamala is also one of her names. Kamala can mean the orange colour in some Indian languages. Whether this name is because of her skin colour or the colour of her dress is a point to ponder upon.

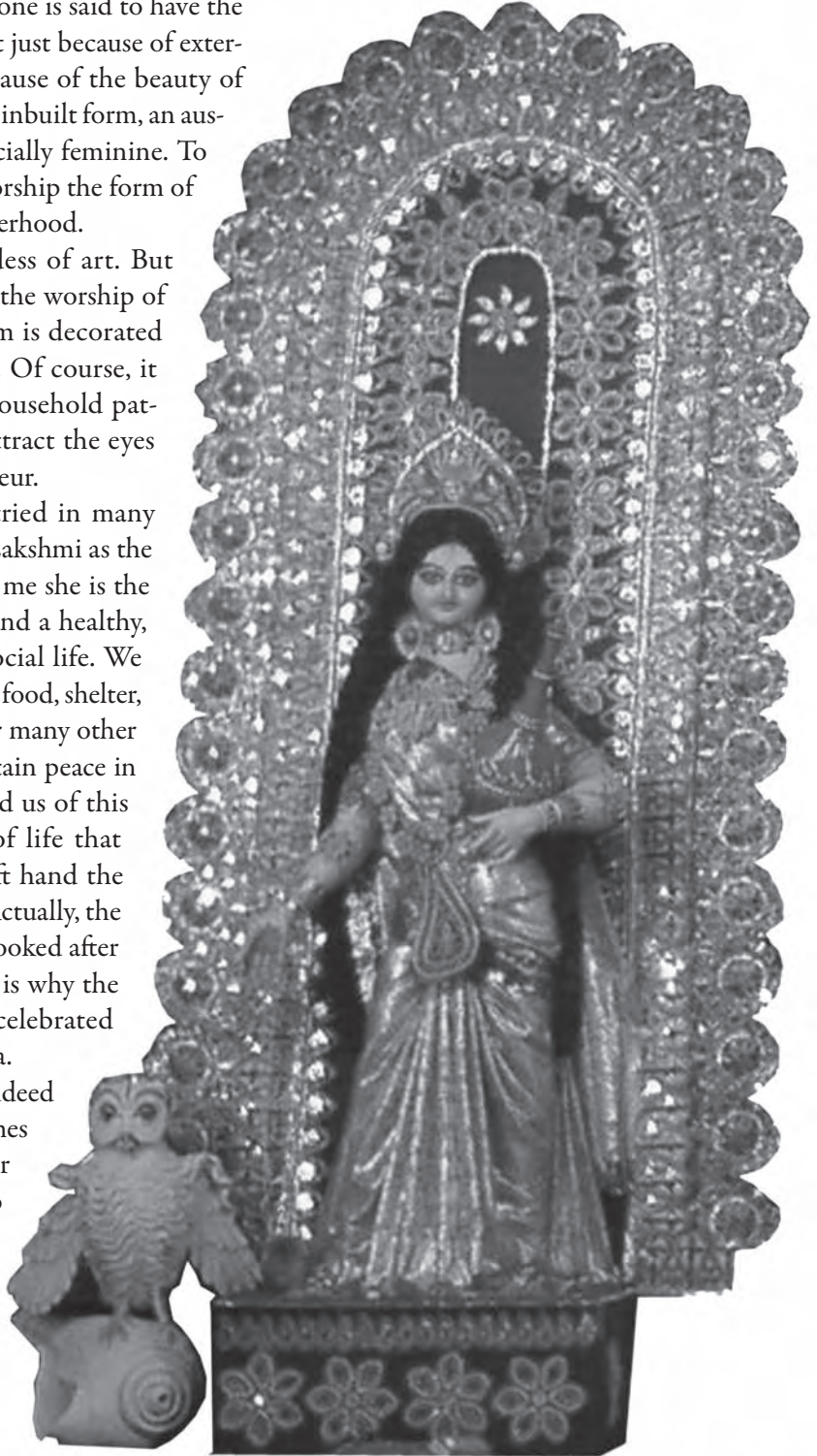
It is commonly said that one is Lakshmi in one's form—the quality of Lakshmi is itself her form. She is not fair. Cosmetics are offered to Mother Durga in her worship but Lakshmi is not given such offerings. She is not beauty conscious in the popular sense. However, she is unique in her form of purity, sanctity, prosperity,

and motherhood. When one is said to have the form of Lakshmi, it is not just because of external beauty but more because of the beauty of their behaviour. This is an inbuilt form, an auspicious appearance, especially feminine. To worship Lakshmi is to worship the form of mother, to worship motherhood.

Saraswati is the goddess of art. But there is art embedded in the worship of Lakshmi too. Every room is decorated with art, in her worship. Of course, it is art, but the familiar household patterns also wonderfully attract the eyes and mind of the connoisseur.

Though many have tried in many ways to portray Mother Lakshmi as the goddess of wealth, yet to me she is the symbol of family peace and a healthy, wealthy, and beautiful social life. We need wealth to arrange for food, shelter, and clothing, and also for many other things necessary to maintain peace in the family. It is to remind us of this very important aspect of life that Lakshmi holds in her left hand the symbol of wealth, a pot. Actually, the department of wealth is looked after by the god Kubera. That is why the festival of Dhanteras is celebrated before Diwali or Kali Puja.

Mother Lakshmi can indeed be worshipped in the homes of kings, rulers, and other wealthy people. They too need a happy family life. But she is needed more in the new palm-leaf roof of a dilapidated thatched hut, in the new mud coat on a cracked wall, in the cow-dung



coating on a mud floor, and above all in the artistic decorations made from rice paste and in the practice of the rural art of wall paintings.

Let there be prosperity everywhere, the prosperity of Lakshmi. Lakshmi, who is the symbol of a healthy, beautiful, loving family life—in her one hand is paddy as the symbol of appeasement of hunger, in her other hand is a pot, symbol of her help in times of adversity, her storehouse, the storehouse of Lakshmi:

Let us have Lakshmi's store in every house
 Let us daily keep a handful of rice there
 Know this to be the way of savings
 It'll help you when difficulty is there

A handful of savings daily ends up as a large amount in time. This is the teaching of Mother Lakshmi, the good result of wisdom. On the altar of Mother Durga is Ganesha, and his place is with Mother Durga. Lakshmi is also the symbol of wisdom like Ganesha. Her worship is a daily worship, in the evening with the lighting of the lamp. In her worship, the conch-shell is blown, but not drums, not even bells. When worship is a celebration, a festival, then let there be drums and cymbals to inspire all. But there cannot be a festival every day. That is why in daily worship, not sound, but silence and love have great importance in life. The night is full of darkness and so we need light to see and also to keep an eye on every nook and corner of the house. That is why the special worship of Lakshmi is performed on the full moon day. She is the Mother of the house and protects her children from dangers. She needs to be constantly on the alert to watch for the surreptitious entry of the enemy into the house. That is why her vehicle is the nocturnal owl. There is a need to be cruel to the enemy who bores his way into the house or enters the house through a hole.

Generally, all offerings to Lakshmi in her worship are vegetarian, non-violent. But her

watch is violent, she kills the enemy. There is stored wealth in the house for times of adversity. An unbroken alertness is required to guard that store. For the same reason, we need sentries on the borders of a country to keep the citizens in peace and comfort. When the situation demands, one has to become cruel towards the atrocious attackers. As one's country is one's

A handful of savings daily ends up as a large amount in time. This is the teaching of Mother Lakshmi, the good result of wisdom.

home, Mother Lakshmi is also the Lakshmi of the country. Then the army of the country acts as the guardian owl on behalf of the nation. Incidentally, the crest of the Defence Services Staff College of the Indian Army located in Ootacamund or Ooty in the Nilgiri hills of Tamil Nadu, is an owl. In 1998, the Indian Postal Department issued a postal stamp of six rupees with this crest to commemorate the golden jubilee of the college.

In how many ways is Mother Lakshmi responsible towards her children!

There is the tradition of worshipping Mother Lakshmi on the same altar after the worship and immersion of the image of Mother Durga. The reason could be this: War against the demons that disrupt the harmony of society results in the loss of wealth, power, and prosperity—war always brings loss and destruction. The right thing to do after a war is to make good this loss and to bring back the normal healthy prosperity without any delay. This has to be done with the love of a mother, whether or not it is a biological mother—mother, affectionate mother, a true, responsible mother. Society changes constantly. I would be happy and proud if the Mother Lakshmis of this world get a place of honour in all auspicious observances.



The Sri Sarada Devi Ashrama of South Africa—A Haven of Peace

Pravrajika Ishtaprana



SRI RAMAKRISHNA, had prophesied that he would be worshipped in many countries other than India. He also said that his picture would be worshipped in many homes. This prophecy is absolutely true for South Africa.

Sri Ramakrishna says that God does the work and human beings call it theirs. It is amazing that Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda have made their presence in South Africa and taken their seats in the hearts of hundreds of devotees who have implicit faith in them and revere them as incarnations of God. Attracted by their simple yet profound teachings, many devotees are drawn to these spiritual luminaries. Thus the Sri Sarada Devi Ashrama has become a spiritual home to many seekers of God. Sri Ramakrishna has come to make religion simple and destroy the demon of doubt with the invincible weapons of love and humility. People feel happy to know that God, seated in their hearts, listens to their earnest prayer,

offered wholeheartedly at his feet. The understanding that there is only one God, who has infinite names and forms, brings comfort to all. Devotees have found solace in Sri Sarada Devi's pure and unostentatious life.

The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa was founded in 1942 by Swami Nischalananda, who was its first president. After establishing the headquarters of the centre in Glen Anil, Durban, Swami Nischalananda purchased a property to build an Ashrama in Asherville, another suburb of Durban.

Monastic Centre for Women

Swami Shivapadananda, the second president of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, established the Sri Sarada Devi Ashrama, which was officially opened in March 1984 as the Asherville branch of the centre. In keeping with the vision and ethos of Swami Vivekananda's wish to have a separate and independent monastic order for

women, Swami Shivapadananda established the Ashrama as a monastic centre for women in February 1985. It is the only independent women's convent in South Africa, with women residents only.

Pravrajika Atmaprana, the first nun, and Brahmacharini Gargi—now Pravrajika Ishtaprana—and some initiated disciples of Swami Shivapadananda, were the first residents at the Ashrama. Pravrajika Atmaprana was the head until her passing away in 1999. Pravrajika Ishtaprana became the next head.

The Ashrama, which is situated in the heart of the busy city of Durban, serves as an oasis of spirituality. Once within its loving precincts, Sri Sarada Devi's overwhelming spirit and enchanting grace are palpable. It is a haven of serenity and security to all those who visit it.

The building is simple, yet unusual and attractive. Much of its beauty is not visible from the outside. Only those who enter the temple grounds feel its heavenly peace and tranquillity. It has a large Om sign on the high dome, which has the shape of a *shivalinga* and is visible from afar. As visitors walk down the stairs and enter the building, they are met by a tall image of Sri Ramakrishna standing in samadhi. His blissful smile and upraised hand welcome all lovingly. Entering the main shrine, which is fully carpeted, one notices that the land has a gentle gradient sloping down to the bottom. Many broad steps gracefully lead to the beautiful altar in front. Devotees sit in this prayer hall for japa, meditation, and prayer services. The beautifully sculptured image

of Sri Ramakrishna is majestically seated on a lotus, under the high dome. The life-size marble image and lotus were brought from Kolkata, India. On either side of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda are seated comfortably on suitable little chairs, in cut-out pictures. All who enter the shrine experience the living divine presence and the blessings of these three. Leaving the main shrine, they enter a spacious area of the shrine of Lord Shiva. The *shivalinga*, which was brought from the sacred Narmada river in India, is seated in a little pond with clean water. The *shivalinga* is high above the water and is surrounded by a well-arranged rockery, creating the idea of the Himalayas with Ganga flowing down. The *shivalinga* is beautifully decorated with flowers and bilva leaves and is worshipped every morning and evening.

Sri Sarada Devi's Enchanting Grace

The Sri Sarada Devi Ashrama became fully autonomous in April 2003. The aims and ideals are spiritual, social, cultural, and humanitarian. With Swami Vivekananda's motto of '*Atmano mokshartham, jagat hitaya cha*; for one's own liberation and for the welfare of the world,' as its ideal, the Ashrama engages in spiritual and humanitarian activities. This allows both the monastics and society to progress. The life and teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the ideal of the organisation, serve as a role model and guiding light to many a weary soul. Today the Ashrama serves as an inspiration to women, children, youth, and householders for

Altar at Sri Sarada Devi Ashrama



practising prayer and meditation, and serves the living God through its multifarious humanitarian programmes. The activities incorporate the four yogas as espoused by Swamiji, and strive to stimulate holistic living and inner transformation. Some of the activities are described here.

Prayer Services

Sri Sarada Devi says that a person who makes prayer a habit can easily overcome all difficulties and be calm and undisturbed amidst all troubles. The serene shrine, which seats approximately six-hundred people, is at the heart of all the activities. Devotees tangibly feel the peace, love, and comfort of Sri Sarada Devi's divine presence.

The daily routine of the shrine includes morning and evening meditation, morning and evening vesper services, ritual worship, and mid-day food offerings. While the midday food offering takes place in the shrine, devotees gather together in the shrine of Lord Shiva for a prayer service. The Bhagavadgita is chanted, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is read, and devotional songs or hymns are sung. During Ekadashi day every fortnight, the *Ramanama Sankirtanam* is sung.

Sri Sarada Devi said that whatever we eat must be first offered to God and that if we eat such sanctified food, our mind will be purified. Remembering her infinite grace and love to feed people, devotees partake of the sanctified lunch in the dining room at the Ashrama. As one looks at her large picture, sitting with her legs outstretched before, one sees her compassionate glance cast benevolently over her children, as they happily have their food.

Sri Ramakrishna advises that in the morning and evening we should set aside all work and think of God. Encouraging families to pray together, weekly prayer meetings are held in the Ashrama. The congregational prayer enables families to bond, be united, and live in harmony.

The prayer meeting is held every Sunday from 8:45 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. and commences with the chanting of the Gita. Prayers and hymns in Sanskrit are chanted. Devotional songs in various languages including Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati, Telugu, and English are sung and a discourse on practical Vedanta, based on the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, is delivered. Sri Ramakrishna says that if we clap our hands and sing the name of God, all evil thoughts will fly away. The melodious singing and chanting in unison creates an enchanting atmosphere in the shrine, enabling all to pray with devotion. Thereafter, classes on Hinduism and personality development are held for youth and children. Families feel inner joy and a sense of belonging to the Ashrama. Having listened to inspiring discourses on practical spirituality, they eagerly look forward to returning to the Ashrama.

Festivals

Sri Ramakrishna constantly reminds us that the purpose of life is to realise God. Hindus are blessed to have many festivals, each of which reminds them of their innate divinity through the wonderful teachings of our scriptures.

Special prayer meetings are held to celebrate the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda with pomp and glory. The birthdays of all the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna are also observed. It was wonderful to see the enthusiasm of devotees to celebrate Swami Vivekananda's one-hundred and fiftieth birth anniversary throughout 2013. An inspiring play on Swamiji's life and teachings was enacted by a cast of forty devotees from six to sixty years of age. The play was presented twice in Durban and again in Ladysmith. An exhibition on Swamiji's life and teachings, consisting of forty charts, was displayed in the shrine

and at other venues during 2013. The exhibition gave an overview of Swamiji's powerful message. Youth delivered talks on various aspects of Swamiji's life throughout the year.

Kalpataru Day and Guru Purnima are also observed with due grandeur. All major Hindu festivals such as Maha Shivaratri, Sri Rama Navami, the nine-day programme includes chanting from the Ramayana, Sri Hanuman Jayanti, Sri Krishna Janmashtami, the eight-day programme includes chanting from the Gita, Sri Ganesha Chaturthi, Navaratri, the ten-day programme includes the chanting of Devi Mahatmyam, and Diwali, are celebrated annually. In addition to prayer and devotional songs, the youth present cultural items in the form of plays and traditional Indian classical and folk dances. Sri Sarada Devi said that the easiest and best way of solving the problems of life is to silently repeat the name of God. Day-long japa yajna is held as women devotees perform japa in the shrine throughout the day, on these auspicious occasions.

During many of these festivals professional singers and musicians present their talents in the shrine. Lunch is served to all who attend the celebrations. Many householder devotees,

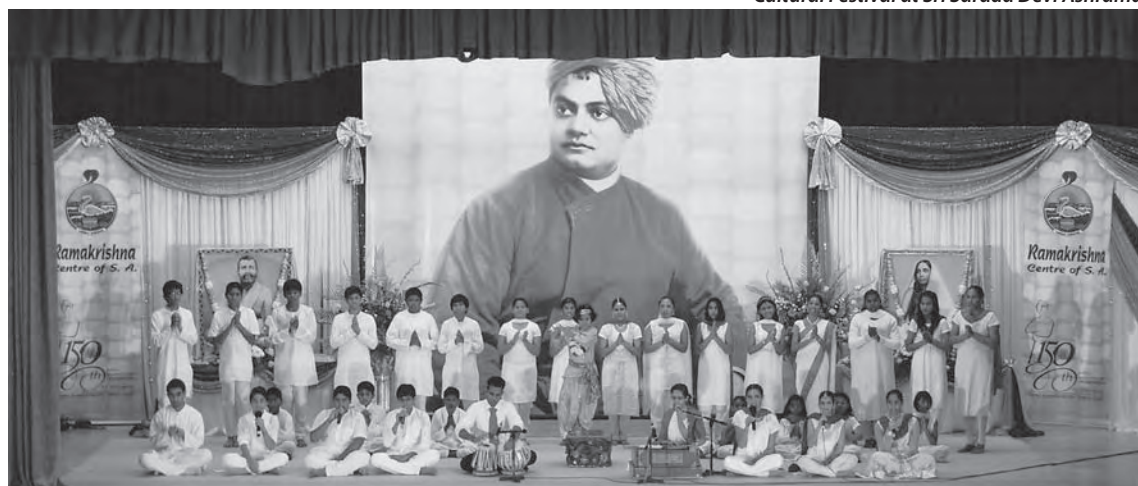
including youth, lovingly offer voluntary services during these important celebrations and during the Sunday prayer meetings, to ensure the success of the festivals. It is through the grace of Sri Sarada Devi that her children work in a spirit of unity.

Youth Programmes

Swami Vivekananda had faith in the younger generation and he believed that his workers would come from the youth. Youth are the future leaders of our society, thus it is imperative that we nurture them to become able leaders and responsible members of society. It is important for all to live in harmony and accept each other, especially since we live in a multi-ethnic society. The youth programmes empower them to face challenges boldly.

A value-based course on Hinduism is conducted for the youth. The learners are graded from preschool to the matriculation level. Prescribed texts are used for the classes, which are held every Sunday after the prayer meeting. Based on the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, the lessons include a structured course, highlighting the importance of prayer,

Cultural Festival at Sri Sarada Devi Ashrama



meditation, and chanting from the scriptures; stimulating character and personality development; promoting moral and spiritual values through stories from the scriptures and everyday life; encouraging family values; and learning simple worship.

Living in a multicultural society our children are faced with many challenges, especially that of being questioned about one's religion and cultural practices. The Ashrama strives to empower them to understand their religion and answer such questions. Examinations are held in March every year.

The Annual Children's Cultural Festival allows youth and children to participate in a variety of cultural activities such as plays, Indian folk and classical dances, scriptural recitals, and the singing of devotional songs. The plays are based on the lives and teachings of great personalities. These activities enable participants to display their talents, improve their concentration, be responsible, learn moral values, develop self-confidence, and keep good company.

Youth Day programmes, which include debates, quizzes, talks, group discussions, and other cultural events, are conducted to allow the youth to discuss their challenges and ask questions about spirituality. These programmes instil self-confidence and equip them to be strong, knowing that God is always with them. They also learn to care for and accommodate others.

Women's Retreat



Women's Programmes

Sri Sarada Devi says that it is not that we will not face any difficulties but they would not last forever and would pass away like water under a bridge. Taking her life and teachings as a guide, the Ashrama holds seminars and conferences annually. Topical issues are discussed such as '*Parenting: A Hindu Perspective*', '*Spiritualising Daily Living*', and '*Hindu Scriptures*', with emphasis on the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* as the modern scripture. These programmes conclude with a question-answer session.

Sri Ramakrishna says that one cannot think of God amidst worldly responsibilities and needs to occasionally go into solitude for contemplating on God. The Ashrama holds regular retreats for women. These are greatly appreciated as it gives them an opportunity to contemplate and find solutions to their challenges and doubts. They learn the importance of regular prayer and to be loving and forbearing.

Classes on scriptures such as the *Upanishads*, *Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Devi Mahatmyam* and the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are held regularly. Classes on ritual worship and singing are also held.

Humanitarian Outreach Programmes

The Ashrama has as one of its main aims, the integral message of Swami Vivekananda that service to man is worship of God. Due to the economic recession in South Africa and the high

Pravrajika Ishtaprana with Women Devotees





Sandwich Distribution

unemployment rate, many people are in need of the bare essentials of life. Humanitarian services are rendered to many indigent families, especially women and children irrespective of race, colour, or creed.

Sri Sarada Devi said that the purpose of one's life is fulfilled only when one is able to bring joy to another. Through the generous support of devotees and well-wishers, the Ashrama donates groceries and other essentials to indigent families in the greater Durban area. We also proffer assistance to schools, old-age homes, children's homes and informal settlements. Some of the projects include providing sandwiches and meals to school children; donating school fees, stationery, uniforms, shoes, and school bags to students; bursaries to students for tertiary education; donation of fresh vegetables to needy families and food for mentally challenged patients each week, distribution of grocery hampers to indigent families each month; distribution of special grocery hampers to innumerable families on Diwali; and donation of blankets, clothing, and utensils to the poor.

Occupational therapy is offered to patients each week. Through the grace of Sri Sarada Devi, these treatments have proved to be very beneficial as those who were once immobile are now able to walk.

Community projects are undertaken to help families become self-sufficient. Women are encouraged to make and sell eatables with raw materials provided by the Ashrama. Some of them are trained to assist with the duties at the Ashrama, enabling them to enhance their



Grocery Hamper and Vegetable Distribution

self-esteem. They also attend the weekly prayer meetings and feel empowered to face their challenges.

Publication

The Vedanta Bookshop propagates Vedanta as taught by Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. The bookstore stocks a wide variety of scriptures, books on Vedanta, meditation, personality development, children's books, pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, CDs, DVDs, and other Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. These are imported from Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, and Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, India. The Ashrama has produced compact discs containing prayers, devotional songs, and hymns. The *Prayer Book*, with many songs and hymns, is used by hundreds of devotees. Free literature is distributed to the congregation during all the important festivals.

The *Dipika* is a children's magazine, which is published by the Ashrama annually. The interesting stories emphasise moral and spiritual values and the importance of regular prayer. Booklets

Publications



on the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda and leaflets on important teachings, are printed for free distribution. The *Royal Swan* diary, published annually, has become popular over the past fifteen years.

Visiting Dignitaries and Media


We are happy that the nuns of Sri Sarada Math, Kolkata, India, including Revered Pravrajika Amalaprana, the General Secretary of Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, have visited Sri Sarada Devi Ashrama of South Africa. Revered Pravrajika Amalaprana graced Swami Vivekananda's one-hundred and fiftieth birth anniversary, which was held at the Durban City Hall and attended by over six hundred delegates. Many monks of the Ramakrishna Order from India and abroad have also blessed us with their holy presence. The devotees always benefit from their eloquent and practical teachings.

Radio Saffm requests the members of the Ashrama to give regular talks on their programme *This New Day*. The inspiring and motivational messages are intended to encourage listeners to be positive, remember God, and have a blessed day. This gives us an opportunity to promote the stimulating messages of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, which inspire people to live fruitful lives. *Radio Hindvani* and *Lotusfm* also request

members to present talks during Hindu festivals. During Swamiji's one-hundred and fiftieth birth anniversary, the youth presented Swamiji's life and teachings over the radio. In December 2014, Sri Sarada Devi's one-hundred and fiftieth birth anniversary celebrations held at the Ashrama, were broadcast by the SABC television programme *Sadhana*.

Conclusion

Many devotees have beautiful pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda in their home shrines. They find infinite solace in their wonderful teachings. Sri Sarada Devi's last message is soothing and comforting. She said that if one wanted peace of mind, one should not find fault with others but see one's own fault because this whole world is one's own. Sri Ramakrishna assures us of his presence in his photograph. We can meditate just by looking at him. Swamiji gives us much hope when he says that all power is within us and that we can do anything and everything.

We feel blessed to know that Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, are themselves doing their work. Their teachings give consolation and direction to all spiritual aspirants. It is through their grace that the multifarious activities of the Ashrama become successful. May they always guide and bless us to be their fit instruments. Glory to Mother! 

Children Attending Hinduism Classes



Ashrama Bookshop



The Diseases of Modern Life and the Ayurvedic Approach

Bhaswati Bhattacharya

‘Pay particular attention to your health, but too much coddling of the body will, on the contrary, also spoil the health. If there is not the strength of knowledge, nobody would care twopence for your ringing of the bell.’¹

VERY FEW PEOPLE CAN SAY that they know no one with any chronic disease. The karma and comfort of modern life has created societies around the world and the diseases of lifestyle. Most of these diseases today are due not to one event or mishap, but rather to decisions made long ago in our choices around food, exercise, sleep, daily routines, work, relationships, medical care, and spiritual world view.

Ayurveda is the oldest systematic thinking about health and disease created by humans. It is also part of human karma that the last century has seen humans cast the views of Ayurveda out of daily reach, relegating it to derogatory terms of being only preventive, useless, and unscientific. Thus, the wisdom of Ayurveda is practised by very few people in its authentic form, using it for curing disease, promoting healthy longevity, and enhancing wisdom.

Ayurveda is a world view that advocates human allegiance and surrender to the forces of Nature that are described partially in modern physics, chemistry, and biology. As these forces, described in encoded form in the Vedas and advocated by the Hindu world view, are uncovered slowly by the modern sciences, society is newly discovering science that in fact was already

described but only for those who had the maturity to decipher the magic of the truth. Ayurveda simply states these truths in typical sutra form; those who ponder on each sutra may unravel the message encoded quietly in the terms, much as DNA is coiled and supercoiled, and when fully opened, has revealed the blueprint of life.

Evidence-Based Ayurveda

The problem with Ayurveda today is not the science itself nor the theories or knowledge of healing according to Ayurveda. The science itself is quite sound and can be demonstrated through observation of humans using it properly under the guidance of a knowledgeable person. The problem lies with the common human understanding of it, access to it mentally and practically, and how to apply it to human lives, which are riddled with habits of the westernised, urban, modern, industrialised lifestyle.

Medical sciences have ‘discovered’ and unravelled clues about the body, health, and disease, grounding the ciphered truths that remain wrapped in Ayurvedic verses. The findings of modern biomedical sciences substantiate with biochemical or radiological reasoning why certain Ayurvedic prescriptions were made for certain diseases.

The Human Microbiome

An ecosystem of microbes—bacteria, fungi, viruses, and one-celled organisms—coexist on

and in the human body. Long thought to be sterile, the gut is now known to harbour a hundred trillion of the body's nine hundred trillion organisms. The human body itself has one hundred trillion cells, one-tenth the number of microbes it hosts. Each individual has a different collection of organisms, called a microbiome, and they change with diet, environment, diseases, and

Creating the ability to connect the conscious mind with the inner pharmacist is the work of yoga. This has been proven many times by watching the abilities of yogis.

hygiene. In fact, the organisms growing on the left hand differ from those growing on the right hand. The lungs of two people living in the same home have different organisms. These organisms start to inhabit the body when the foetus makes its way into the world through the birth canal, then suckles its mother's breast.

What is the purpose of these microbes? They make vitamins that the body cannot, especially B vitamins and K vitamins. They have enzymes that the human body does not have, and therefore break down compounds we eat that we cannot otherwise digest. They signal our immune system to make signals crucial to the development of our defence system. They salvage carbohydrates that would otherwise waste some of the plants we eat. They produce some of the precursors of healthy fats, short-chain fatty acids—SCFA, that our body requires in order to prevent 'bad fats' from accumulating in our system. They produce antibiotics that we cannot make, thereby preventing disease bugs from infesting our body.

The idea of food being defiled because someone has partly eaten it, popular in Indian culture, makes sense when we think about the microbiome. Attention to contamination of our

ecosystem and its bugs with another person's ecosystem could result in imbalance. It is one reason that Ayurveda and common Hindu culture advocates hygiene, not sharing utensils, and inner clothing. The seventh chapter of the Ayurvedic text *Madhava Nidana* discusses in detail the twenty types and four origins of these microbial organisms, some of which were native in the gut. It also discusses worms and other parasites. Ayurveda also discusses the concept of *satmya*, a person's individualised approach to health and wellness based on what she or he grew up eating, thinking, and breathing, and thus the balance that the person maintained with those foods, temperatures, and behaviour. A specific microbiome correlates highly with this personalised and individualised approach to treatment planning and is one of the reasons why the same treatment cannot work successfully for two people with the same disease symptoms.

The Power of Intention

In the 1990s, a series of experiments done in New Jersey explored the power of the mind to convert energy into matter, pushing the ideas of post-modern physics. The now-famous PEAR experiments, of the Princeton Experimental Anomalies Research team, examined the ability of participants to imagine in their minds and convert a series of random number generators to create non-random numbers. They also calculated matter in black boxes, applied concentrated focus and power of the mind, and found changes in the quantity of matter. These are widely rejected by people who cannot reconcile the power of the mind to manifest intention into actual matter.

However, there continue to be experiments. In the 1970s experiments were done in the cardiac care unit, with non-relatives praying for patients. Termed accessory prayer, the intervention was shown repeatedly to positively affect

the outcome and patients' health compared to another blinded, randomly-assigned group for which no prayer had been done. Dr Larry Dossey has collected these experiments and pontificated over their significance, concluding that non-local prayer and mindful intention can affect the subjects of our intention. Business coaches guide people to develop their abilities to move projects forward, create wealth through intention, and shift conditioned behaviour. Ayurveda absolutely advocates the training of the mind to create what we want in our lives.

Food as Medicine

Mainstream legitimate medicine, also called Allopathy or biomedicine, has long stated that diets do not impact the body significantly and are not curative, and therefore cannot be considered medicine. Until the past decade, physicians could be de-licensed for using foods and nutrition as their primary medicine. However, the past several years have shown that foods impact our gut and our microbiome; foods impact our development of cardiovascular disease; foods impact our development of obesity, which is one of the main risk factors for many chronic diseases. Ayurveda advocates the how, when, and what of food as a key pillar of health and intervention of diseases.

Inner Pharmacology

While many modern scientists are committed to the idea that a placebo is equivalent to nonsensical or non-therapeutic interventions, what this means is that the power of the mind to create changes is the actual mechanism of placebo. Ayurveda does not discount the power of the mind. In the absence of or despite the presence of an external drug, the mind's inner pharmacy dispenses an array of hormones, antibiotics, neurotransmitters, and everything the

body needs when it is healthy. Keeping the inner pharmacist in tune with the body is the challenge. Creating the ability to connect the conscious mind with the inner pharmacist is the work of yoga. This has been proven many times by watching the abilities of yogis. A successful yogi may have control over her or his autonomic nervous system, physiology, breath, and other functions considered uncontrollable. Ayurveda seeks to empower the inner pharmacy by maintaining harmonious currents of thought, action, and communication between the mind, body, senses and soul. Such inner harmony creates a clean space for the gradual opening of the mind to control the body.

Chemistry and Metals

Since World War II, the mainstream world has convinced the public that heavy metals are dangerous, because they are toxic. People have come to blame complex diseases on heavy metal poisoning, completely dismissing the knowledge that metals were purified and bound to herbs and incinerated to produce small particles that could be absorbed easily and safely by the body. These *bhasmas* would penetrate into those sites where cancer cells grew and hidden infections flourished rampantly, and would kill the fast growing cells. The metals were then carefully chelated out of the body using a series of purifying and rejuvenating steps tailored to the fire, strength, and constitution of the patient. If the step was done with the guidance of an Ayurvedic expert, the metal could be brought out of the body safely and easily, supported by diet, exercise, sleep, and proper supportive medicines. Ayurvedic *bhasmas* are still widely in use to the tune of lakhs of doses per year, as they are very effective when prescribed and guided by Ayurvedic physicians, who are competent in their use. Most of the side effects occur from improper medicine makers and incompetent medicine prescribers.

Epigenomics

Decades after the DNA was discovered, the machinery used to regulate and read the DNA came under investigation. Over the past fifty years, it has been discovered that there are more components to the genetic story. RNA and protein, which are written in the DNA code, have a multitude of functions, one of which is to open and close the DNA strands. Modern molecular biology has revealed that chemicals that enter into our body can make their way to the DNA to affect how it is read. Foods, environmental toxins, poisons, medicinal molecules, and cellular signals can and do affect the DNA structure and function. People, who change from their ancestral diet, have now been shown to change the way their DNA is read, or expressed. The science of these expressions on top of—epi—the message of the DNA—genome—is called Epigenomics, and this research is revealing the powerful role of processed foods, heavy metals, nanoparticles, and cancer promoters.

The Doshic World

Ayurveda suggests to us that if we live with the ebbs and flows of nature, and better understand the direct relationship between our health and the flows of our activities, we can get a greater understanding and begin more competent self-care.

The three principles of Doshic philosophy ground the relationship of the world as a constant movement between energy and matter. The principle of all that flows as gas is called *Vata*, with qualities similar to air and ether: cold, dry, light, mobile, and rough. Everything in our body and our environment that flows is influenced by *Vata*, which in fact is most things. *Vata* is the initiator and the instigator, the beginner of processes.

The principle of all that transforms is called

Pitta, with qualities similar to fire and water: sharp, fiery, acidic, and flowing. Everything in our body and our environment that is transformed is influenced by *Pitta*, including our enzymes, our digestion, our interpretation of information that comes into our being—such as light, other beings, sound, thoughts. The principle of all that flows as liquid is called *Kapha*, with qualities similar to water and earth: stable, cool, heavy, and grounding. Everything in our body and our environment that is grounding, lubricating, and sustaining in the material form is influenced by *Kapha*.

According to Ayurveda, the loss of the complete, unbounded vitality that is *Ojas*, is described by the disease complex of *Prameha*, an increase in urination that foreshadows the development of chronic diseases such as diabetes mellitus, obesity, and problems with the cardiovascular system. In modern medicine, these are sometimes called metabolic syndrome.

Diseases due to our choices and our lack of courage to take control of our power to choose lie at the heart of many conditions called ‘Lifestyle Diseases’. These ailments are often associated with the modern, urban, westernised way of living, though many of them existed in the ancient days when Ayurveda was captured into the classic texts of Ayurvedic medicine, beginning around 500 BCE. These conditions include cardiovascular diseases, chronic fatigue, arthritis, chronic migraine, low back pain, constipation, irritable bowel syndrome, hypothyroid, diabetes, psoriasis, eczema, dry eyes, hyperacidity, ulcers, uterine fibroids, and varicose veins. In fact, many of these diseases are conditions in which chronic inflammation in the body creates pain, breakdown of tissues, and an imbalance between the hormones and signals of the body.

Unlike any other system of medicine, Ayurveda describes the beginnings of lifestyle diseases

in great detail and has a unique and accurate ability to prognosticate or predict what can happen to a person if these etiologic factors continue and the mind remains unbridled.

The sign of vigour, the sign of life, the sign of hope, the sign of health, the sign of everything that is good, is strength. As long as the body lives, there must be strength in the body, strength in the mind, [and strength] in the hand (6.62).

Svastha Vritta I: Attitude is Foremost

The first factor described in Ayurveda for the pursuit of health and cure from disease is the mind. Factors that lead to mental worries, grief, and discontentment are the first step down the slippery slope of disease. In the *Charaka Samhita*, the acharyas focus on factors that promote longevity, strength, nourishment, delight, and happiness.² The first step is control of the mind and a conscious awareness of what a person allows into her or his environment or actively takes into her or his being.

Attitude is the first principle that is required for cultivating the knowledge, practices, and behaviour that will promote health. Choosing to have a positive attitude in all situations is a learned behaviour from our parents, schooling, environment, and various teachers. Fatalist or negative attitudes do not promote health. Trusting that each of us has a place in the universe helps us to belong. You must know that the flow of the universe includes *you* as a variable in the almost infinite equation of variables, and that your best efforts and positive attitude will attract good things into your life. This is called the power of intention in the modern day, and it has been used by yogis to create and manifest all that is needed in the form of matter from energy.

Non-violence is the foremost promoter of longevity of life. The attitude of non-violence is

more than an outward lack of violence and passivity. It also includes an active attitude of promoting harmony in the world. It asks the mind not to engage in the foes of worry, anxiety, hatred, resentment, fear, lust, gluttony, and over-indulgence in passions which lead to addictive desires that beget violence. Examples are numer-

The greatest promoter of strength is the concept of celibacy. In Ayurveda, celibacy encompasses prowess and fortitude from good quality tissues of the body.

ous, and can be found if we analyse the causes of most wars on the planet.

The greatest promoter of strength is the concept of celibacy. In Ayurveda, celibacy encompasses prowess and fortitude from good quality tissues of the body. Foods and activities that promote *Ojas* give a strong mind, body, resilience, good immunity, and resistance to disease.

Knowledge is the great promoter of nourishment and grounding, for nourishment is not only food but the knowledge that underlies our pursuit of food. In holistic nutrition courses, nourishment is taught as fulfilment in our work, relationships, inner pursuits, a sense of spirituality, and our physical body. Food, diet, nutrition, and calories only form a part of nourishment. True knowledge promotes our awareness of what is real food for our bodies and naturally prevents us from wanting processed, dead food. True knowledge also shields our desires for unhealthy foods that lead to diseases such as obesity and inflammatory conditions in the gut, which further lead to inflammatory conditions in the body.

Self-control of the sense organs is said to be the greatest promoter of delight and the ability to be content. The discipline of yoga and the practice of spirituality, both address the yoking of the mind, with its infinite possibilities and

quick movements. The sense organs, the five senses of knowledge, interface our mind and soul with the world. Over-stimulation of the sense organs leads to addictions, uncompensated desires, and other enemies of the mind. Under-stimulation leads to withdrawal, depression, lack of connection, and hopelessness from a lack of experience. Aberrant stimulations lead to perverted thoughts that make us see the world in patterns that are not harmonious with the way Nature flows. Thus, self-control allows us to engage our hearing, touching or feeling, sight, smell, and taste to the world around us and to enjoy the balance that is Nature. This attunement to harmony gives us delight and the contentment that is often translated as happiness.

True intimacy with oneself, one's soul, mind, and body, as well as emotional trust and harmonious mental intimacy with family, friends, and teachers allows each of us to lead a harmonious life, and protects us from the imbalances that disarm us and lead to disease.

Why spend so much time on the mind when discussing lifestyle diseases? The mind controls our intake, attitude, and conditioned behaviour. When we can change these, we can change the course of our diseases. It is simple, but it is not easy for most adults.

Svastha Vritta II: The Practical Use of Ayurveda in Modern Life

Lifestyle science is known as *Svastha Vritta* in the discipline of Ayurveda, to ground oneself, *sva-stha*, in correctness, *vritta*. After the foundation of a good mind-body connection is laid, the pillars of good preventive health are cast. The main components include understanding and counselling of proper sleep, self-control, food, rest, and medicines.

Many guidelines are given by Ayurveda, but the observable truth is that most of today's

Ayurvedic physicians in India do not practise the guidelines in their own lives. Therefore, patients find it difficult to accept what they are told. Ayurveda requires us to 'walk the talk'. Furthermore, many Ayurvedic physicians do not explain how to make their guidelines practical and usable in today's world, where money and time are always in shortage. How do we make them practical in this urbanising, modern, Western world?

Things that mark the modern world—money, commerce, materialism, superficial relationships, cellular phones, internet, television, electronics, technology, artificial and processed foods—make it difficult for us to simplify our lives. In fact, society would prefer that we do not have simple lives, as the rules of commerce and profit require us to psychologically favour those industrialised, comfort-centric ideals. In protest, spiritually-evolving people in the West have begun a movement toward a simple, less material life. The tiny house movement is a group of people who consciously choose to live in smaller houses, with fewer possessions that are more functional towards their goals in life, with a greater emphasis on *doing* and *being* and less on *having*.

Ayurveda teaches us that to preserve health, we must reconnect with the balance of Nature. To do this while living in the modern world, there are a few practical guidelines for curing lifestyle diseases. Known broadly as *Vihara*, they involve the knowledge, attitudes, and practices that we call our lifestyle. They revolve around food, exercise, sleep, daily routine, work, time, relationships, medical care, and having a spiritual world view.

(To be concluded)

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Love for All—as Envisaged by Swami Vivekananda and Sri Chaitanya

DK Sen

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, born more than one hundred and fifty years ago, conveyed in its original form to the world, the fundamental message of Hindu philosophy. He exhorted the youth to channelise their enormous energy in character-building rather than dissipating it in mere ritualistic worship. A revolutionary preaching indeed! That too from a Hindu monk! It was almost unthinkable amongst his contemporary Hindu religious leaders, not to speak of those before him. Swamiji could identify the power of religion to provide a proper direction to modern civilisation. He believed in translating precept into practice, an ethos he inherited from his guru Sri Ramakrishna, and uncovered the essence of the power of religion—to explore the divinity in living beings.

Swamiji emphasised an uncompromising love for humanity and its empowerment. His deep respect and un-fathomed faith towards the divine love could be best illustrated in his own words: ‘The only way is love and sympathy. The only worship is love.’¹ Swamiji’s entire mission was influenced and governed by the words of his guru Sri Ramakrishna: ‘Not compassion to Jivas but service to them as Shiva.’² While commenting about the prevailing socio-religious system in India he expressed his deep love and sympathy for the toiling men and women and prescribed ways to make religion practical and all inclusive: ‘The present Hindu society is organised only for spiritual men, and hopelessly crushes out everybody else. Why?


Where shall they go who want to enjoy the world a little with its frivolities? Just as our religion takes in all, so should our society.’³ One is reminded of what he wanted to impress upon his followers while writing to Alasinga Perumal. He openly declared his conviction: ‘Love never fails, my son; today or tomorrow or ages after, truth will conquer. Love shall win the victory. Do you love your fellow men? Where should you go to seek for God—are not all the poor, the miserable, the weak, Gods? Why not worship them first? Why go to dig a well on the shores of the Ganga? Believe in the omnipotent power of love’ (5.51). At the same time he never failed to make public his unfailing faith in God. He wrote: ‘I believe in God, and I believe in man. I believe in helping the miserable. I believe in going even to hell to save others’ (5.52). In order to reach out to the millions of common people and make his ideals acceptable to them, he proclaimed his message in a simple but understandable manner, just like his guru: ‘Who serves Jiva, serves God indeed’ (7.247).

While remembering the message of universal love and the reformist religious ideas left behind by Swami Vivekananda for later generations, we are reminded of a great event, not far back in time, that happened in Bengal. A little less than four hundred years before Swami Vivekananda, the religious scene of Bengal was greatly dominated by the one who is believed to be an apostle of God, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Born in Nadia in Bengal, the erstwhile seat of learning, Sri

Chaitanya also became known as ‘mad Chaitanya’ under the intoxication of love for Sri Krishna. He was not only a great Hindu Vaishnava religious teacher but also a forerunner of the religious reforms in India. He pronounced that ‘love’ is the true essence of religious practice. He believed that simple repetition of the words ‘Hare Krishna’ with love pleases God more than strict observance of religious rituals. He was a pioneer social activist and recognised everybody’s right to religion. He waged war against social systems nurturing narrowness, lack of openness, and divisions in society. A scholar of logic, he epitomised universal love for the weak and the outcast. Above all, he suggested not to worship but to love God. In the prevalent socio-economic, political, and religious ambience in Bengal, we can imagine how difficult it would have been to even conceive these ideas, much more to implement them.

It would be relevant at this point, to reminisce how Swami Vivekananda outlined his assessment of this great monk, Sri Chaitanya. While talking of bhakti, Swamiji lauded Sri Chaitanya: ‘Nowhere is seen such sublime unfoldment of feeling as in Bhagavan Shri Krishna Chaitanya, the Prophet of Nadia’ (5.269). He explained how the influence of Sri Chaitanya still exists throughout India: ‘He was preaching barefooted from door to door in India, begging Achandalas (all down to the lowest) to love God’ (4.337). Swamiji unambiguously enumerated the ideas of Sri Chaitanya that were still relevant to the masses: ‘Gather from Shri Chaitanya, his heart, his loving kindness to all beings, his burning passion for God, and make his renunciation the ideal of your life’ (5.347). Swamiji respectfully remembered him as the doyen of the Bhakti Movement: ‘One of the greatest teachers of Bhakti the world has ever known—mad Chaitanya. His Bhakti rolled over the whole land of Bengal, bringing solace to every one. His love knew no bounds. The saint or the

sinner, the Hindu or the Mohammedan, the pure or the impure, the prostitute, the streetwalker—all had a share in his love, all had a share in his mercy’ (3.266). Swamiji connected the personality of Sri Chaitanya to the incarnation of Sri Ramakrishna: ‘The time was ripe for one to be born who in one body would have the brilliant intellect of Shankara and the wonderfully expansive, infinite heart of Chaitanya’ (3.267). In one of his letters Swamiji exclaimed: ‘Good Lord! Of all Incarnations Lord Chaitanya was the greatest’ (6.320). But at the same breath he did not hesitate to point out that ‘he was comparatively lacking in knowledge’ (ibid.). In another context he expressed the view that ‘Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Chaitanya, Nanak, Kabir, and so on are the true Avatars, for they had their hearts broad as the sky—and above all, Ramakrishna’ (6.394).

Great men get their novel ideas from the seeds of thought sown in the past. The same was the case with Swamiji. What Sri Chaitanya conceived to be the essence of religion—some centuries before Swamiji—echoed in Swamiji’s mind and was reflected in his teachings of true religion and universal love. In his formative years, Swami Vivekananda was influenced by the spiritual intellect of Sri Chaitanya—possibly through his guru Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Chaitanya spread the message of love for all as the fulfilment of his love for Sri Krishna. Swami Vivekananda preached that love for all beings in itself was the worship of God. God could be worshipped by treating living beings as God while serving them. 

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Masonic Vedanta

Guy L Beck

(Continued from the previous issue)

Universal Religion

Brother Prosonno Coomar Dutt

THE MASONIC TENETS of universal brotherhood and equality would be put to their first official test when Prosonno Coomar Dutt, P C Dutt, a Bengali in Calcutta, petitioned for the Degrees from Lodge Courage with Humanity No. 392, in 1863. When the matter was placed before the new Provincial Grand Master, Brother Hugh David Sandeman, he promptly ruled that, 'Hindus were not eligible for admission into Masonry, and further that it was not desirable with reference to social considerations that they should be admitted, and as long as he held a veto under the By-laws he would exercise the power rigidly.'³³

In response, Dutt set out to demonstrate that the basic teachings of Freemasonry must in no way exclude men of other races and religions, and that his own personal beliefs coincided with those of the lodge. In a formal statement, he pleaded:

I am not a pantheist or a polytheist. I do not identify my creator with any one of his creatures. I believe in the existence of one Great Architect of the Universe, whose wish is the happiness of all creatures, whose will is law ... I humbly trust that your Lordship may ... revoke a decree that debars so many of the human race from an Order which professes to be open to all and to exclude no man on account of his religion. In common with a large number of my countrymen, I am, for social reasons, obliged to conform to certain caste rules, but I am not

now, nor ever was, an idolater; and while Muslims, Jews, and Parsees are admitted, I complain that our [Hindus] exclusion is most unjust.³⁴

To make matters worse, the Provincial Grand Master determined that, due to the native Hindu beliefs in polytheism, there was no form of oath that could be binding on a Hindu. Yet Dutt

By the admission of non-Europeans as full members, Freemasonry ultimately succeeded in bringing a new wave of equality and fellowship to the otherwise divided colonies.

fought this point with the rebuttal, inquiring, 'Whether a Hindu can be initiated into the Craft on the same oath as that by which he assumes charge of the duty of a Judge of the High Court or a member of the Viceroy's Council, etc.'³⁵ At that time, many educated Bengalis who were already practising law requiring an oath of allegiance to a higher power, began to question the double standards that they perceived around them.

Eventually, the English Grand Master, in accordance with the liberal approaches of Masonic tolerance, struck down these by-laws, and ultimately made it possible for the free admission of Hindus. As a result of Dutt's diligence on matters of belief, his petition was finally approved, and in 1872 he was raised a Master Mason in Anchor and Hope Lodge No. 234, English Constitution. Brother Prosonno Coomar Dutt was a man of strong determination who nonetheless endured nine years of endless petitions,

correspondence, religious explanations, rejection, argument, and appeals with Masonic officers in England and India. By 1874, Dutt was elected as Master of Anchor and Hope Lodge, becoming the first Indian to become Master of a Lodge in colonial India. He was elected Deputy District Grand Master in 1895.³⁶

By the admission of non-Europeans as full members, Freemasonry ultimately succeeded in helping to bring a new wave of equality and fellowship to the otherwise divided colonies. According to Harland-Jacobs, 'Dutt and other South Asians who joined Freemasonry had forced British Masons to fulfil their institution's claims to cosmopolitan brotherhood.'³⁷ She affirmed that, 'Dutt's initiation marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of Freemasonry in India, a period in which it was not unusual to see multiracial lodges and widespread admission of indigenous candidates, regardless of their religion. Of the approximately 100 lodges at work in India during the early 1870s, at least one fifth included indigenous members' (ibid.).

The ecumenical nature of Masonic gatherings may have been the impetus for a further surge in membership. As stated by a contemporary Masonic historian, 'Resolution of these issues came in the second half of the nineteenth century and many Indians, regardless of caste or religion, flocked to join the Craft. They were fully integrated within the lodges, the books which they regarded as holy being placed alongside the Bible on the Master's pedestal.'³⁸ This practice continues in India whereby five volumes of sacred law (VSL) are placed on Masonic altars: 'Under the Indian [Masonic] constitution, it is obligatory for a lodge to keep open the *Bhagavad-Gita* [Hindu], the Bible [Jew and Christian], the Koran [Muslim], the *Zend-Avesta* [Parsi] and the [Sikh] *Granth*.'³⁹

A reference to Rudyard Kipling is instructive here. When Kipling joined the Lodge of Hope

and Perseverance No. 782 in Lahore, he wrote on the diversity he found in his lodge: 'In '85, I was made a Freemason by dispensation (Lodge Hope and Perseverance 782 E.C.), being under age, because the Lodge hoped for a good Secretary. ... Here I met Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, members of the Araya and Brahmo Samaj, and a Jew tyler [sentinel in the lodge] ... another world opened to me which I needed.'⁴⁰ Later, upon his moving to Allahabad in central India, Kipling chose to participate in a lodge that had non-Europeans among its members.⁴¹

Even members of the English nobility were astonished at how well Freemasonry had been adopted by the native Indians at this time. Lord Ampthill said in 1901 when he was District Grand Master for Madras: 'It seems to me that here in Freemasonry we have found the common ground on which we can meet in friendly fashion, exchange ideas without restraint or formality, and get to know and understand one another better. If I am right, and if Freemasonry in India is tending to this end, it will be the best influence that the Craft has had on the destinies of mankind.'⁴²

Brother Vivekananda

Brother Prosonno Coomar Dutt introduced the twenty-one year old Narendranath Datta, who later became famous as Swami Vivekananda, to the Craft in his Lodge Anchor and Hope in 1884. Prior to P C Dutt and the issue of the by-laws, a handful of Hindus had joined various lodges in silent and simple fellowship. In these cases, however, there was little attempt to reconcile Hindu philosophy with Masonic teachings in a credible or sophisticated manner. Now was the time to strike a more serious and abiding liaison between Masonry and Vedanta.

As a brilliant student at the Scottish Church College in Calcutta, Narendranath studied avidly the great European philosophers such as Kant,

Hume, and Hegel. In time he grew dissatisfied with the rituals and dogmas of Hinduism followed by members of his community, and began attending meetings of the Brahmo Samaj. His father Vishwanath Datta, a successful High Court attorney, wanted his son to follow his own footsteps. Vishwanath's close friends, including both W C Bonnerjee, the first President of the Indian National Congress and the most distinguished advocate of his time, and Nimaichandra Basu, the attorney-at-law whose firm employed Narendranath as an articled-clerk, were active members of a Masonic lodge, Lodge Anchor and Hope. While Vishwanath's membership is not recorded, he encouraged his son to join the fraternity: 'For the sake of his future career Vishwanath made Narendranath become a Freemason, for by this time he had reached the minimum age-limit of 21 years. On February 19, 1884, he joined the Anchor and Hope Lodge, No. 234 (now the Grand Lodge of India No. 1). In those days, it was the fashion for educated Indians, mainly lawyers, judges, and government officials, to become Freemasons.'⁴³ Narendranath was subsequently passed as a Fellowcraft on 15 April, and raised as a Master Mason on 20 May 1884, twelve years after Prosonno Coomar Dutt was admitted to the Craft in the same lodge. Though he did not become Master of the Lodge, as did Dutt, Narendranath, as a Master Mason, was guaranteed access to all the secrets of the Craft as well as entrance into any duly constituted lodge in the world. Narendranath's Freemasonry was not forgotten in his overseas missionary work as Swami Vivekananda.

Narendranath was no doubt impressed with the principles of universal tolerance and equality as taught in the three degrees of Freemasonry, since these were also core values of Vedanta. He had already been in contact with Sri Ramakrishna for nearly three years, and was even contemplating a life of spirituality and renunciation.

This, along with his own vow of celibacy, seems to refute the notion that he joined Freemasonry purely for professional reasons. It is most likely that he was on a quest for wisdom and realisation of the potential for a practical bond of friendship and brotherhood across ethnic and linguistic lines, values that would meld together with

For the sake of his future career Vishwanath made Narendranath become a Freemason, for by this time he had reached the minimum age-limit of 21 years.

his practical and universal approach to Vedanta. Though uncomfortable with dogmatic Christianity as practised by many Englishmen, Narendranath responded well to his experiences in the Masonic lodge where he saw how morality, toleration, equality, virtue, self-improvement, brotherly love, relief, and truth were fully inculcated in its teachings. As interpreted by Pratap Chandra Chunder

in the Masonic Temple in Calcutta, Narendranath must have seen how such barriers of race, colour or creed were demolished among the Brethren who were associated with Freemasonry. Here the rulers and the ruled, White, Black, Brown, Brahmin, Kshatriya or Shudra, Hindus, Muslims and Christians as Masonic Brethren, met at one level in the Masonic Temple. And for one born and bred in a dependent country and belonging to a subject nation this experience must have been exhilarating.⁴⁴

And he must have thought well enough of the Craft to have established Masonic contact in Chicago six years after taking monastic vows and to prefer being addressed as 'Brother' while in the US. In fact, 'such a personal experience must have emboldened the youthful Indian monk to face the conquering races in the West with confidence and equanimity'.⁴⁵

With the sudden death of his father in 1884, along with financial problems, Narendranath was compelled to discontinue his Masonic activities and prepare for a radical change in his life's mission. Having studied Vedanta from Sri Ramakrishna since their first meeting in 1881, Narendranath decided to heed the call of Hinduism and undertake the life of a religious ascetic. He thus took monastic vows in 1887 at the age of twenty-four, and adopted the name of Swami Vivekananda with

Vivekananda's future-oriented Vedanta, tempered with Masonic humanitarianism and practical charity to others, extended to all areas of life.

the blessing of the Maharaja of Khetri. It was his spiritual perseverance to spread the teachings of Vedanta and to some extent his Masonic training in the practical principles of universal fellowship and charity, that most likely drove Swami Vivekananda to become the most famous and influential Hindu spiritual leader in the world.

Masonic Vedanta

By the end of the nineteenth-century, it seemed Freemasonry and Vedanta were destined to come to terms with each other, both endeavouring to seek a practical realisation and application of the teachings of universal brotherhood, charity, and tolerance under the rule of a supreme Being. Through a close study of the Upanishads, reformed Hindu scholars and thinkers were able to easily circumvent the polytheistic stigma of the Hindu religion by restating the Vedanta principle that all the gods could be viewed as features or aspects of the one true Brahman. This cardinal tenet of Vedanta was not only deemed compatible with Masonic teachings, but was fused with the Masonic principles of humanitarianism and charity to form what is called here Masonic Vedanta.

Swami Vivekananda, as a Freemason and Vedantist, expanded and developed these notions and spread his teachings of universal brotherhood and charity through his worldwide missionary activity.

Historian Shamita Basu has explained how the unique nature of Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta became India's answer to the universalising tendencies of the European Enlightenment: 'The universalization of Hinduism was made possible through the Advaita doctrine, in the sense that it not only paved the path for a practical unification of diverse social groups but at the same time provided for an excellent indigenous answer to the secular philosophy of Universalism at par with the mainstream European Enlightenment tradition.'⁴⁶ Furthermore, Swami Vivekananda's Vedanta was future-oriented and not world-denying as is often the case with philosophy in India:

The humanization or secularization of the religious world-view that Vivekananda brings in introduces this future dimension which is removed from the space of experience under the conditions of colonization of a traditional society. He so constructs Advaita philosophy that it can be transferred and expressed through all forms of diverse secular ideologies, be it nationalism, humanism, or rational philosophy (78).

Vivekananda's future-oriented Vedanta, tempered with Masonic humanitarianism and practical charity to others, extended to all areas of life. Unlike other typical Hindu swamis who practised strict vegetarianism, Swami Vivekananda's liberal attitude towards meat-eating, acquired from his master Sri Ramakrishna, justified by the ancient Vedic practices, and most likely nurtured by his Masonic associations, allowed him to be completely free and open-minded in his social interaction with the West.

Yet despite the fact that Swami Vivekananda had been a Freemason, there are no direct references to Freemasonry in the nine volumes of

The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. It is surmised by the author that since Advaita Vedanta and the Masonic teachings have much in common, though Vivekananda's lectures could have contained Masonic teachings, his emphasis was on Vedanta. The actual Masonic messages were probably meant to be hidden or embedded within the texts, eluding the eyes of non-Masons or persons unaware of Masonic teachings. It is noteworthy how he was able to cleverly weave a fabric of universal religious tolerance that was simultaneously 'Vedantic' and 'Masonic'. Masonic historian Pratap Chandra Chunder has remarked on this situation:

In a sense, Swami Vivekananda is an embodiment of these Grand Principles [of Freemasonry]. It is quite possible that like a perennial underground stream, Freemasonry secretly watered his mental field, which no doubt quenched its thirst from other manifest sources. If he did not expressly acknowledge his debts to Freemasonry, it could be attributed to the secrecy of the Craft.⁴⁷

It was indeed the case that Masonic membership in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was something to be closely guarded by members and not divulged to outsiders.

World Parliament of Religions

Armed with optimism and his new synthetic approach to Vedanta, Swami Vivekananda found an eager audience in the West when he traveled to Chicago in 1893 to attend the first World Parliament of Religions. In this event he made history by becoming one of the first Hindu spiritual figures to introduce Vedanta to the Western world. Receiving an enthusiastic welcome, Vivekananda opened his first address on 11 September with the words, 'Sisters and Brothers of America, ... I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name

of the mother of religions; and I thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects.'⁴⁸ It was reported that when Vivekananda addressed the audience as 'Sisters and Brothers of America', the people went into rapture, with a peal of applause that lasted several minutes.

Vivekananda strongly emphasised the record of Hindu tolerance over centuries as he continued the first address: 'I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth' (ibid.). In a tone reminiscent of Masonic proscriptions of tyranny and fanaticism, Swami Vivekananda struck a chord with his strong anti-fanaticism remarks: 'Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair' (1.4).

Throughout several talks, Vivekananda focused on the gradual perfection of the human being rather than a radical change or abandonment of previous stages in life. In this respect, he resembled Masonic teachings of the gradual receipt of 'Masonic light' through stages or degrees:

To the Hindu, man is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth. To him all the religions, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realize the Infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of these marks a stage of progress; and every soul is a young eagle soaring higher and higher, gathering more and more strength, till it reaches the Glorious Sun (1.17).

A feature of Masonic membership was the certifiable acceptance of a Master Mason into the fellowship of lodges worldwide, as confirmed by a well-known Masonic spokesman of the nineteenth century: 'Every regularly initi-

Swami Vivekananda's eclectic vision was in consonance with Masonic principles, which professed a universal religion 'to which all men might agree'.

ated Freemason has free admittance into any Lodge in the world, and meets therein a fraternal welcome.'⁴⁹ It is certain that Swami Vivekananda, relying on his Masonic association, established contact with Masons when he was in Chicago for the Parliament. According to record, he was scheduled to address the brethren of a lodge in Chicago in January 1894, but his prior engagements prevented him from it. In a valuable letter that has been preserved by the Ramakrishna Mission, it is revealed that on 22 January 1894 Brother G C Connor wrote to Brother Gilbert W Bernard at the Masonic Temple in Chicago:

'My dear Brother,

I take very great pleasure in introducing to you personally and as a Freemason, our East India Brother Swami Vivekananda, whom I have examined in the English Work, in which he was made a Master Mason, in Anchor and Hope Lodge, 236 (should have been 234), E C (English Constitution). I will add that I am here to attend the convention of all the Lodges of this city tonight and the Brethren are very much disappointed that his lecture engagements prevent Brother Vivekananda from being among us.

Sincerely yours,
G C Connor.⁵⁰

This document confirms the factual continuity

between the Freemason Narendranath Dutta and the Hindu monk Swami Vivekananda.

Asim Chaudhuri, in his book *Swami Vivekananda in Chicago; New Findings*, offers proof that Swami Vivekananda visited a Masonic Temple in Chicago. According to the *Sunday Chicago Herald* of 5 November 1893, there was the announcement: 'Lectures by Hindu Monk. Swami Vivikananda [*sic*], Hindu monk, will give a parlor lecture in hall 309, Masonic Temple, Tuesday [November 7] and Friday [November 10] afternoon at 3 o'clock.'⁵¹ There is no mention of the content of the lectures. The Masonic Temple at 55 State Street in Chicago was a twenty-two storey building built in 1892, but has since been torn down in 1939. The follow-up report appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, 8 November 1893:

LECTURE BY THE HINDU MONK

Swami Vivekanandei [*sic*], the Hindu monk who made such a favorable impression in the recent Religious Congress, lectured before an audience of good size, composed chiefly of women, yesterday afternoon at Masonic Temple on the subject of 'Hindoo Philosophy'. He discussed the various religious beliefs and superstitions, giving many illustrations of their causes and effects. But the principle of all religions, he declared, is the same and means that the state of the soul is unconditional and independent. It doesn't require any external force for its existence. 'We are all aiming for the same thing, all traveling the same direction, all going to the same place' (144).

This documentation further supports Swami Vivekananda's efforts to communicate with Masons, thereby being invited to speak in a Masonic lodge.

As he found success in America, Swami Vivekananda frequently spoke about the possibility of a universal religion of tolerance and

brotherhood. Vivekananda held a fervent disdain for the view that only one religion was true. He strongly argued that all religions contain a divine element, a particle of God, so to speak. In this way, his lecturing was silently guided by Masonic principles of tolerance and benevolence, which he was able to link with ancient Indian or Hindu values already found in Vedanta and Yoga philosophies. His eclectic vision was in consonance with Masonry, which professed a universal religion 'to which all men might agree'.

(To be concluded)

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Memory

Swami Satyamayananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

RECALL: MEMORY DEPENDS ON the subjective as well as objective conditions. The force of 'association of ideas' is a subjective condition. A suggestive sign or cue that revives memory is an external stimulus, the objective condition. The original impression, which was the effect of the original perception, becomes a cause in turn and produces recall. The conditions for recalling an impression are numerous. Long lists of empirical things are shown in the *Milindapanna*, *Questions of King Milinda*—the Greco-Bactrian King Menander questioning the Buddhist monk Nagasena. To mention a few: an extraordinary effort recalls previous births, insignia of caste, creed, and calling, intense experience, similarity, and difference of appearance, speech, logic, prompting, arithmetic, meditation, books, laws, codes. The Nyaya-Vaisheshika schools of philosophy add attention, context, repetition, signs, distinctive features, ownership, relations, immediate sequence, similarity of functions, merit, and demerit. To these lists the followers of Sankhya and Vedantins include an unseen force, *adrishta* and reflection. In short, everything and anything recalls previous memory. Generally, writing can access a larger data of semantic and other memory than speaking; this is because writing allows more time for recall.

Recognition: Re-cognition, the original cognition that has left its impression and which is recalled by some excitant, is recognised—once again cognised. Advaita Vedanta holds that recognition is a special kind of cognition produced by sensory inputs and subconscious impressions.

Both cooperate in a single act apprehending the identity of the object in the past and relating it to the present. Hence recall is different from recognition. Recall is a simple revival of a past object; recognition is always qualified by time, place, and circumstance of the past and the present.

Active and Passive: There are two types of memory: passive and active. Passive memory is a spontaneous recall; it depends on the energising of the impressions of past cognitions and not upon a person's will. It appears in spite of a person's desire to forget them. Perception of a similar object and an unseen agency are its causes. Active memory depends on the volition of the person.

Automatic: Generally, motor skills are never forgotten. Routine work, swimming, playing a musical instrument, and so on, become automatic and can be revived easily. These actions, which start with the help of memory, are deliberately repeated till the impressions go deeper and deeper and crystallise into habits. One can play the piano and talk simultaneously, recite a verse while thinking of dinner. Automatic actions are not lost except through serious injury or disease.

Memory as a Vritti: Patanjali states that memory, *smriti*, is a class of *vrittis*. Swami Vivekananda's commentary on this aphorism is:

Memory can come from direct perception, false knowledge, verbal delusion, and sleep. For instance, you hear a word. That word is like a stone thrown into the lake of the Chitta; it causes a ripple, and that ripple rouses a series of ripples; this is memory. So in sleep. When

the peculiar kind of ripple called sleep throws the Chitta into a ripple of memory, it is called a dream. Dream is another form of the ripple which in the waking state is called memory.¹⁷

Thus, memory is a kind of retrieval system that brings subconscious impressions to consciousness. If this class of *vrutti* is controlled, it will not raise the other four classes of impressions. Vijñanabhikṣu, a commentator of Yoga Sutra, says that *vrutti* is that which provides the where-withal to live. The mind without *vruttis* ceases to function as mind. Impressions are in the states of *tanu*, attenuated, *prasupta*, dormant, *vicchinna*, severed, and *udharanam*, expanded. It is like a person's strong desire for chocolates, which the doctor has forbidden. Every time the desire arises, so does the remembrance of the doctor's warning. Gradually, dwelling on the deadly consequences attenuates the desire. When that desire does not arise, it is said to be dormant. But suppose the person enters a confectionery, that dormant desire will suddenly get expanded and rise to the surface forcing the mind to satiate it. If the desire doesn't arise even in the presence of chocolates then it is known to be severed. There is mere memory of it but it no longer controls the person.

Temporary Loss of Memory

Impressions fade if left unused. Some other causes are: an unhealthy body, intoxicants, bad food and habits, and emotions like lust, greed, hate, anger, pleasure, and pain. Charaka, the father of Indian medicine, also adds epilepsy along with the prominence of the qualities of *rajas* and *tamas*. Other causes are when an original cognition is obscured by contrary cognitions, preoccupation with other thoughts, and emotions. Concussion, illness, and manic depression can also be added to the list. An example of fasting having an impact on memory is found in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*: A young man Shvetaketu is asked by his father to

go without food and sustain only on water for fifteen days. Shvetaketu did as he was told. His father then asked him to recite the Rig, Sama, and Yajur mantras. Shvetaketu couldn't. He replied, 'Sir, they indeed do not flash in my mind.' His father then asked him to eat and Shvetaketu found all his memory and other mental powers returning.¹⁸ On the other hand gluttony dulls the mind. Thirst too can be added to this list. Breathing compressed air for a long time gives nitrogen narcosis, which confuses the short-term memory. The Bhagavadgita cautions against loose living, 'Dwelling on objects, there arises attachment for them. From attachment grows hankering, from hankering springs anger. From anger follows delusion; from delusion, failure of memory; from failure of memory loss of understanding; from this the person perishes.'¹⁹ Madhusudana Sarasvati's commentary on this verse says: 'One perishes, becomes unfit for all the human goals, as a result of losing the understanding which is a fruit of that (memory).'²⁰

Destruction of Memory

Going back to 'S', the person with phenomenal memory, later in life he tried to erase and destroy parts of his memory that were cluttering up his mind. He used to recall some memory, write it down, and burn that piece of paper. Symbolically done, he thought, memories would be erased; they were not. On the other hand, strangely, memory is seen to fail us, does this mean that there could be an impression deleting mechanism integrated somewhere in the system itself?

The law of parsimony states that once an impression is recalled and re-cognised the original cognition is destroyed by the next impression, of the same object or its like, which takes its place. This naturally will eliminate clutter. For example: instead of having ten impressions of ten pots all stacked upon one another for ten times a pot was

perceived, it is better to have just one impression. The retrieval system does not have to scan ten pot images on the perception of the eleventh for evaluation. Scanning will take time. Thus recognition would not be instantaneous and will use energy superfluously. One might have perceived a pot ten times but there is only one impression of a pot. Logically, this seems to be good.

This logic, however, does not go well with the law of karma, which holds that every impression is retained. About scanning ten stacked impressions on seeing the eleventh pot, it takes no time at all. How much time does a supercomputer take to scan the data of ten pots? Almost none. The mind's processing speed of perception is much greater than a supercomputer's, and even a million impressions of pots is nothing for it. The other objection regarding the original impressions being destroyed by the new one is also not tenable. If the impression of a pot seen a year ago is destroyed when the present one is seen, and if the current impression will be destroyed the very next moment the same pot is seen again, how does proper recognition take place? Recognition means seeing a pot and recalling the past impression of another pot delineated by time, place, and circumstance. So if the first pot's impression is destroyed along with these qualifications, there will be confusion in memory which will take the form: 'It is a pot but I do not remember where or when I have seen it before'.

The counter argument put by the proponents of the first way of thinking is that when the original pot's impression is destroyed by the second cognition, this second cognition takes in as a residue, the time, place, and circumstance of the first pot as it was seen a year ago, say in Delhi. When this in turn is destroyed by the third cognition a few seconds later, this third impression takes the form of, 'this is a pot, which I am seeing, seen a few seconds before, which was seen one year back in Delhi'. To illustrate: the mental picture of a pot has a tag saying

'one year back in Delhi', besides it a second tag saying, 'a second ago, right here', the third impression with another tag adds 'right here, right now'. So a single impression has a number of tags that tell its history. Each time a new cognition destroys the old impression of the pot it interprets its tags. So there cannot arise any confusion of memory.

The proponents of karma theory assert that it then amounts to stating the same thing, only differently. What is the difference between scanning ten stacked impressions and scanning ten tags of one pot? From another standpoint, if impressions are absolutely indestructible then freedom from bondage of karma will be impossible and scriptures teaching liberation will become nullified. What about the impression deleting mechanism in the mind and its function? When memory fades and is lost, how can these two standpoints be reconciled? Apart from this, bondage, it is taught, is due to a worldly mind, meaning memory of worldly objects. Freedom is a mind purified from these stains. How this is effected, is a big question but before an explanation can be presented, it would be proper to look at another vexing philosophical question.

Predestination and Self-Effort

Each thought gives rise to another in a sort of causal fashion, with many causes working simultaneously. If memory from such thoughts is indestructible, irrevocable, and inexorable as people who believe in predestination or fate say, man would be no freer than a tree or a blade of grass. Those who say that one is a maker of one's own destiny simply reject this proposition. This has been the fight from the very beginning between the believers of destiny and self-effort.

The truth is that lazy people and those with defeatist attitudes see themselves to be inevitably under the inexorable law of karma. Such people believe that effort is useless and everything is pre-ordained and predestined. From their standpoint

they are right for they are impelled by the course of Nature instead of pulling back and fighting. There is a big place for self-effort in one's activity and thought. Self-effort is a kind of power and is in tune with scriptures, one's nature, and the higher aspirations that the human race is heir to. Just shutting the eyes and watching thoughts will give you an idea of the power of self-effort. Thoughts can be stopped, slowed, raced, modified, transformed, and ignored. If a person can do this to thoughts, bearing this power on actions is a cakewalk. Sri Sarada Devi says that japa can lessen the intensity of karma: 'If you were destined to have a wound as wide as a ploughshare, you will get a pinprick at least.'²¹ All through history the conscious human being has intensely fought with the powerful Nature both externally and internally. By merely looking around one can know how the human being is trying to overcome Nature; this is the real history of humanity. However, an intelligent person makes use of both powers to evolve further.

How Impressions Work Out

To answer the question of how impressions fade and are destroyed, an illustration comparing them with raindrops will be useful. As raindrops fall, they trickle, and collect into a puddle that flows into another puddle nearby. As the puddles join with one another they become a pool. The pool then flows to become a rivulet, which is joined by other rivulets to form a stream; which is joined by other streams to become a river. The river is joined by other rivers to become a mighty river, which flows to the sea, and the seas merge to become an ocean. Similarly, impressions begin clubbing together as soon as they form. Just as all water is just a collection of raindrops, so also all impressions accumulate and join with similar impressions. The individual identities of the impressions, like raindrops, are lost in bigger and bigger classifications. This is also what Swami Vivekananda meant

when he said: 'There are certain works which are, as it were, the aggregate, the sum total of a large number of smaller works. If we stand near the seashore and hear the waves dashing against the shingle, we think it is such a great noise, and yet we know that one wave is really composed of millions and millions of minute waves.'²² Whenever karma is spoken of, the simultaneous knowledge of the result of karma arises. There is no standard time for fruition hence when it happens after a long period people attribute it to luck or ill luck. Karma bears its fruits or karma works out itself. This is known, in a way, as 'destruction of karma'. Emptying a river of its water means that all the water that had come down as raindrops to form puddles, and so forth, is removed. Likewise when karma works off itself, with it also go innumerable impressions of memories.

Sometimes we relive in our mind an incident from the past. That experience, which had consumed much time and energy, is now so casually, so objectively, so indifferently looked at. It no longer evokes any reaction, either pleasant or painful. Its implication is that karma has worked out itself. If some memories disturb, know for certain that they have yet to be worked out in the future. If impressions of memory have been worked out then how does one remember them? Logically, the traces should have been wiped clean from the mind. Each impression has two parts, the outer and the inner. The outer one is worked out and the inner is like a small indentation on the earth that remains where the raindrop fell. It is due to this that traces of impressions stay and we sometimes have a faint memory. Extraordinary people like yogis can recall, if they want, minutely; ordinary people cannot. This theme will be elaborated upon now.

Medha, Power of Retentive Intelligence and Ahara, Food

Ordinarily, the memory of a scene or even a single

image is a collection of many impressions. The mind makes a collage, as it were, from the impressions and fuses them into a whole. Unless this is done, the image cannot be recalled. Weakly integrated, the image is easily disintegrated by other impressions. Haphazardly done, the recall is haphazard. A spiritual aspirant, to take an ideal example, struggles to retain the image of the chosen deity in the mind. The strength to hold these impressions in their entirety, for longer and longer durations comes from practice. But this strength has two essential and connected aspects: *medha* and *ahara*. *Medha* has been highly praised in the scriptures. A hymn of the Rig Veda alludes to the goddess *Medha*, the giver of intelligence and illumination. Sri Ramakrishna says that anyone practising strict sexual continence for twelve years develops a special nerve, the *medha nadi*, by which one obtains tremendous insight into things.²³ This nerve is indispensable for serious seekers of the knowledge of Brahman. Strict sexual continence and control over the rest of the physical and mental energies produces spiritual energy, *ojas*. This is what 'S' probably did not have and hence he developed many psychological problems. Swamiji, as Sri Ramakrishna attested, was full of it. *Ojas* is the power that resides in the mind. A chaste person in thought, word, and deed has this *ojas*, which forms the background of thoughts and actions resulting in a tremendous mental integration, power, and charm.

Regarding *ahara*, the *Chhandogya Upanishad* says: 'When food is pure, the *sattva* element (of the mind) becomes pure, and then arises unshakeable memory. With unshakeable memory all the bondages are broken.'²⁴ Here, finally the idea that one class of memory can and does destroy another is obtained. Acharya Ramanuja comments on this saying that this is brought about by pure food, free from the three *doshas*, defects regarding cleanliness of food, avoidance

of foods that excite, and mental cleanliness of the cook and the person who serves it. This is not wrong, for we have seen that bad food and toxins that are ingested disturb memory and also the mind is subject to subliminal influences from other minds. Acharya Shankara takes the philosophical view and comments on the same passage thus: 'That which is gathered in is Ahara. The knowledge of the sensations, such as sound, etc., is gathered in for the enjoyment of the enjoyer (self) ... Therefore such knowledge or Ahara purified, the Sattva material of the possessor of it—the internal organ—will become purified, and the Sattva being purified, an unbroken memory of the Infinite One, who has been known in His real nature from scriptures, will result.'²⁵

It was shown that emotions greatly aid in retaining impressions in long-term memory. When impressions come in that are free from the emotional tinge one can have a neutral attitude towards things. This condition is necessary to take hold of the 'memory of the Infinite One' and to destroy impressions pertaining to worldly objects of sound, taste, touch, sight, and smell.

(To be concluded)

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23. See M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 411.
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REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Sri Ramakrishna Karnamritam

Ottur Bala Bhatta

Trans. Swami Tapasyananda

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. Website: www.chennaiamath.org. 2011. xiv + 134 pp. ₹ 32. PB. ISBN 9788178236407.

Words are to ideas what costumes are to persons. Excellent ideas clothed in lucid phraseology are a feast to the mind and the intellect. Literary skills squandered on unspiritual and ungodly themes are '*shava shobhanam*; adornments laid on a corpse'. Words sparkle with special lustre when they are expended on lofty themes. What, then, can we say of a poetical exercise in which the loftiest possible theme is couched in euphonious Sanskrit words, rendered more luminous by a wealth of poetical devices like analogies, similes, metaphors, and what not?

This extraordinary work of poetry is an example of the possibility of producing good Sanskrit literature even in present times. The translator, Swami Tapasyananda, eloquently analyses the language of this work: 'The skill of the author consists in the way in which he has, with such a limited theme, managed to produce this long composition of two hundred and eighty verses, which is both delightful as poetry and elevating as a devotional hymn. The high emotional pitch and the torrential flow of devotional sentiment are sustained throughout. That in itself compensates very much for the repetitiveness of ideas unavoidable in treating the limited theme. It is in overcoming this hurdle completely that the poet has exhibited his masterliness.... Though a master of the Sanskrit Kavya style, he avoids the artificialities and complexities of such a style and adheres to a standard of simplicity, directness and naturalness without the least sign of poverty of expression. The verses are

examples of perfect craftsmanship and look like chiselled pieces of poetic excellence, without at the same time exhibiting any signs of strained artificiality in construction or in the figures employed. ... It is, however, heartening to note that there are still poets like Sri Ottur who can come to levels of poetic excellence that are not far below the achievements of classical Sanskrit poets' (xiii-iv).

The book under review is a delicious pabulum of ripe and luscious jackfruit to readers well versed in Sanskrit. It is sweet honey to readers who have a good knowledge of English. To those fortunate few readers who are proficient both in Sanskrit and English, the book is nectarine salad of honey-soaked jackfruit. The 280 verse-blossoms in this literary garden breathe the fragrance of melodious Sanskrit poetry composed by a consummate wielder of Sanskrit and drip with the delicious honey of lively English annotation by the expert translator, Swami Tapasyananda, a former vice president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Apart from a scholarly and informative introduction by the venerable swami, the book has ten cantos. The introduction gives a lot of interesting details about the gifted poet-devotee. It also acquaints us with the peerless quality of devotional and literary repast that awaits us inside the book. The first canto titled 'The Supreme Glory of Sri Ramakrishna' spells out Sri Ramakrishna's excellences tellingly in lilting Sanskrit poetry. The verse comparing Sri Ramakrishna to 'a River with the ambrosia of Brahman for its waters, rejuvenating the whole Universe' that originates from 'the mountain of non-duality', *advaitadrayavatarini*, that rushes 'towards the Ocean of Love' and slakes the thirst of bhaktas and jnanis, that sweeps off the threefold miseries of samsara, *tapatrayonmulani*, that 'waters the flower garden of Atman' (16), and that aids the growth of the tree of Dharma, *dhamadru-samposhini*, is a model philosophy packaged in mesmeric metaphor and rhythmic poetry.

The second canto titled 'Bhakti as the Highest Spiritual Value' has, among others, a marvellous stanza that highlights the paradox of devotees 'soiling' 'themselves with the dust of' the lotus-feet of Sri Ramakrishna, *tvatpadabja-rajasa malini bhavanti*, to attain purity (22).

The third canto titled 'Aspirations of a Seeker' have stanzas brimming with pathos as they mirror the agony of the aspirant who impatiently asks: 'When shall that blessed day dawn when Ramakrishna, the sole support of all renouncers, the ultimate end and meaning of human existence, will call me, wallowing in wretchedness, with the soft movement of the ends of his eyelids resembling a lotus petal, to share that love of which he is an embodiment?' (33).

In the fourth canto titled 'Sri Ramakrishna, My Sole Refuge', there is a remarkable stanza in which the poet-devotee clearly identifies Sri Ramakrishna with Sri Krishna. In that verse, he compares the grim duel raging in his mind between his devotional urge and worldly tendencies to 'the fatal duel between Bhima and Jarasandha' (48) and fervently prays Sri Ramakrishna to aid him in his struggle as he had helped Bhima in the past.

In the fifth canto titled 'Universal Love and Dispassion', the poet-devotee lacerates his mind with the whiplash of blunt self-reproach in and admonishes it for its proneness to evil tendencies and for its vulgar hypocrisy in posing as a devotee.

In the sixth canto titled 'Longing for the Lord', the sentiments expressed bear the charming imprints of vaulting fancy of the poet. To quote the words of the translator, 'The wick of my mind, soaked in the water of sexuality, is not able to catch the flame of thy smiling face. Do thou dry up that wick with the breeze of renunciation and soak it well in the oil of devotion for thee.' In the final verse of this canto, the poet addresses Sri Ramakrishna as Marutpate, the Lord of Guruvayur. Thus, he hints at not only his vision of Sri Ramakrishna as Guruvayurappan, Sri Krishna, but also at the happy resemblance that his hymn bears to the epic poem of Narayaniyam.

A verse of the seventh canto captioned 'Bhakti as Superior to Mukti' articulates the idea of both knowledge and ignorance being a menace to devotion, the former branded a deadlier foe to devotion

than the latter. The devotee, the poet says, can be cured of the malady of ignorance only to gain the perfect health of devotion. But, all-devouring knowledge does not let its victim escape from its clutches to land on the gentle lap of devotion.

In the eighth canto titled 'Practice of Devotion' there is a marvellous verse in which Sri Ramakrishna is addressed variously as 'O Devotee of Kali! O Servant of Rama! O Master of the Tantric discipline! O Lover of Krishna! O Adept in the path of Non-duality! O Follower of Nabi! O Votary of Christ' (84). This verse is a graphic and crisp portrayal of the Master's diverse spiritual exercises to establish the truth and validity of all religions and is strikingly illustrative of Sri Ramakrishna's catholic and universal outlook.

The ninth canto titled 'I know of no God other than Sri Ramakrishna', has a verse in which the poet says that Sri Ramakrishna is a Tirtha in three ways: 'a Tirtha (or preceptor) of Gangadhar, Sasi and other disciples, a Tirtha (or sacred water) that gives relief from the parching heat of Sam-sara; and a Tirtha (or one whose life was an occasion) for the constant service of people afflicted with spiritual problems' (105).

Many verses in the tenth and final canto titled 'Prayer and Resignation' etch vividly Sri Ramakrishna's various physical postures, mental attitudes, and spiritual moods. A verse describes how he appears differently to different people and that he is a good-for nothing man to the ignorant, an imposter to the evil-minded, a madcap to the rationalist, a guide to the moralist, a Yogi of high attainments to the spiritual aspirant, and a condensation of Satchidananda to the enlightened ones.

This book is a happy amalgam of devotional impulses and literary flourishes and a devotional contagion to which readers may willingly fall a prey for their own redemption. It is an exciting show in which Sri Ramakrishna struts forth in his amazingly multiple roles as supreme God, a spiritual titan, a spiritual scientist, an impeccable knower, a delirious devotee, a terror to worldliness, a messiah of unity and reconciliation, and a mainstay of dharma. The notes and the index to the verses at the end of the book add to the value of the book.

N Hariharan
Madurai

MANANA

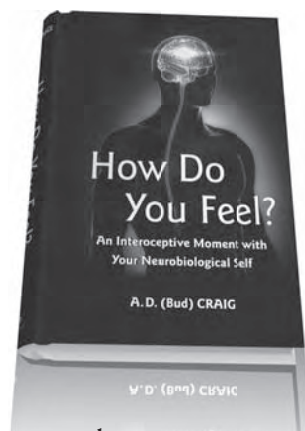
**Exploring thought-currents from around the world.
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***How Do You Feel?*
*An Interoceptive Moment with
Your Neurobiological Self*
A D (Bud) Craig**

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton,
New Jersey 08540, USA. Website: www.press.princeton.edu. 2015. xvii + 343. \$39.50. HB. ISBN 9780691156767.

This book presents a new perspective on the origin and significance of human feelings, that is, one based on recent neuroscientific evidence. It is not a book about connecting with your feelings, although ideas described here could lead you to practical insights. In this book, I explain ideas about structures and connections in our brains that are associated with feelings—any and all feelings. Based on evidence acquired in my own laboratory and a wealth of converging evidence from others, I present a model that offers plausible neurobiological explanations for how feelings are generated in our brains, what feelings represent, and how we experience our feelings.

First, I will describe the characteristics of the neural basis for the affective feelings from our bodies, such as hot, cold, muscle ache, hunger, pricking pain, and so on; much of this evidence comes from results obtained in my own laboratory, and I explain how my colleagues and I obtained the evidence. I focus on the surprising findings, the anomalies that didn't quite fit, which finally made sense after I realized that the distinct feelings we have from our bodies are elements of a neural representation of the physiological condition of our bodies. Such sensory activity is needed first of all for homeostasis, the process that maintains the health of our bodies—and thus, it



seemed most apt to use the term *interoception* for the sensory representation of the condition of the body, enlarging it to relate to all tissues of the body, instead of just the 'interior' tissues, or viscera. I describe how a key imaging experiment that was intended to validate this conceptual shift in humans produced striking evidence that underlies the heart of this new perspective on feelings; the evidence demonstrated for the first time that subjective bodily feelings are based directly on interoceptive integration in insular cortex. The convergence of this evidence with findings by others in widely disparate fields of neuroscience, psychology, psychiatry, and clinical medicine suggested quite clearly that the neural substrates which substantiate bodily feelings also provide the basis for our subjective awareness of emotional and social feelings, like pleasure, anxiety, trust, and anger. Together these results provide a solid foundation for well-known ideas about the embodiment of emotional awareness—in particular, they support the James-Lange theory of emotion and its modern refinements, the somatic marker hypothesis and self-perception theory. They can explain 'how you feel'.

As I present the evidence, I explain how the homeostatic principle of optimal energy utilization underlies the neural integration that produces interoceptive feelings, subjective awareness, and forebrain asymmetry of emotion. The

evolutionary success of every living organism depends on efficient energy utilization, and the evolutionary pressure for interoceptive neural optimization was heightened by the increasing proportion of the body's energy budget used by the hominid brain (approximately 25% in adult humans and 60% in infants); thus, the model is consistent with the social-brain hypothesis of evolutionary forebrain enlargement and with the anthropological recognition that energy utilization was a crucial arbiter of hominid brain evolution.

I am a neurobiologist; more specifically, I am a functional neuroanatomist, which means that I have expert knowledge of the structural basis underlying the functional organization of the brain. I came to this field from an undergraduate education in mathematics and here I explain both how my interests changed and how my collaborators and I gathered evidence on the neural substrates for feelings from the body. I share with you a few of the exciting moments during the work that produced these discoveries, and I describe how I arrived at inferences that are based on the knowledge of fundamental patterns of neuroanatomical organization that I have gained in nearly forty years as a neurobiologist. While I refer to the writings of psychologists, psychiatrists, and philosophers, I am not an expert in these fields. My purpose in writing this book is to provide you with a different perspective about 'mental' phenomena than you can learn from psychologists, psychiatrists, and philosophers and to make it accessible so that you don't need to become an expert neurobiologist in order to understand these ideas.

The ideas described in this book first appeared in technical research papers and theoretical essays that have been increasingly acknowledged and cited by other researchers because they provide a fundamental change in perspective, a so-called paradigm shift, and they offer a cogent basis for the extraordinary convergence of evidence from many fields of

study. I decided that it was time to write this book, and to share this perspective more broadly, after emails had begun to appear in my in-box, not just from graduate students and postdoctoral scientists studying the brain, but from undergraduate university students whose teachers had assigned my scientific papers as supplementary or required reading material in their courses. I wrote those research reports and theoretical opinion articles for working, professional neuroscientists doing research, and they are succinct and dense. Slowly I realized that if those articles convey ideas that are important to undergraduate college teachers, even though densely written and relatively inaccessible, then it was time for me to set these ideas down in a readable fashion for students and educated readers.

The notion of writing a widely accessible description of these ideas in book form was a daunting challenge for me. I normally craft my scientific writing using precise words and specialized terms tempered by fine subtleties that make each statement precise, nuanced, and ... yes, difficult for non-scientists to understand—dense. I prepared for writing this book by rereading particular books I had enjoyed while I was an undergraduate and graduate student, books that presented a novel scientific perspective in a lucid and wonderfully engaging style. (One of my favourite was the timeless monograph by the physicist Erwin Schrödinger, *What is Life?*) Many of the books were written in an informal style using direct language and everyday examples, and I try to emulate that accessible style here. If some parts of this book nevertheless seem dense to you, I apologize. My goal is to explain these ideas clearly and make them accessible to the educated lay reader. Again, it is not my intent to make you an expert in functional neuroanatomy. If a question arises in your mind at some point, I hope that as you continue to read, you find that I address it soon afterward, perhaps in a box if not in the text.



REPORTS

Headquarters

The annual Public Celebration in connection with Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 1 March 2015. More than a lakh visitors thronged the premises throughout the day. Cooked prasad was served to about 30,000 persons.

New Mission Sub-Centre

Sevavrata, a philanthropic institution at Bairgachhi village in Murshidabad district has been made a sub-centre of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi, and renamed '**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama (Sevavrata), Bairgachhi**'. Its address is 'Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama (Sevavrata), Village Bairgachhi, PO Kalitaladiar, District Murshidabad, West Bengal 742165'.

News of Branch Centres

On 24 February Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the new classrooms and the renovated school building of the primary school of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Cherrapunji** at Umsohsun, Shillong, and also unveiled the new statue of Swamiji on the school campus. On the following day, he opened the new primary-cum-secondary school building of the centre at Nongwar, East Khasi Hills District, and also unveiled the new statue of Swamiji on the school campus. On 26 February, he declared open the shopping complex that has been built by the centre on the land provided by local administration for unemployed youths at Cherrapunji.

The Community College Scheme of University Grants Commission (UGC) was inaugurated under the College of Arts and Science of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore** on 4

February. Under this scheme a one-year diploma course in Construction and Building Technology will be conducted wherein the students will have an opportunity to work as interns in construction industry while pursuing the course.

Ramakrishna Mission, Delhi has been conducting its three-year value education programme for some months in various schools in India affiliated to CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education). Smt Smriti Irani, Union Minister for Human Resource Development, formally inaugurated this programme in a function held at the Ashrama on 14 February. Nearly 325 people, mostly principals of CBSE schools and a few teachers, attended the programme.

The new monks' quarters on the Pilapuzha campus of **Ramakrishna Math, Haripad** was inaugurated on 15 February.

Swami Gautamananda inaugurated the new monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Hatamuniguda** on 10 February.

The History of Science in India jointly published by the **Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata**, and National Academy of Sciences, India (NASI) was released by Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj and Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice Presidents, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, in a function held at the Institute on 6 March. In the same function, a DVD of the book and a multimedia DVD on Swamiji's select lectures were also released.

The name of the road connecting the library of **Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur** to Dhantoli Park has been changed from *Central Park Road* to *Shivananda Marg*.

On 9 February, Swami Suhitananda inaugurated the new higher secondary school building, the VIP dining hall, and the renovated

auditorium at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur** and the new staff quarters at Kundla, a sub-centre of the Ashrama. On the same day, Sri Kedar Kashyap, Minister for Tribal Affairs and Education Minister, Government of Chhattisgarh, inaugurated the centre's ITI complex with an administrative building, two workshops, an automobile-servicing centre, two hostel buildings, and four staff quarters. The centre also held a *kisan mela* (farmers' fair) on 25 and 26 February which was visited by more than 7,000 farmers.

Swami Suhitananda inaugurated the monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore** on 3 February, the sacred birthday of Swami Adbhutanandaji Maharaj.

Swami Suhitananda inaugurated the new vocational training centre at **Ramakrishna Saradashrama, Ponnampet** and also launched the Ashrama's mobile bookstall on 5 February.

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara had held a state-level written quiz competition on Swami Vivekananda in which 74,529 students of 989 schools in 34 districts of Gujarat participated. On 1 February prizes were distributed to the state-level and district-level topers in a function in which Smt Anandiben Patel, Chief Minister of Gujarat, was the chief guest.

The new staff quarters at **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban** was inaugurated on 22 February.

Four ministers of the Government of Bangladesh, namely Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Mr Rashed Khan Menon, Agricultural Minister, Begum Matia Chowdhury, Minister for Information, Mr Hasanul Haque Inu, and State Minister for Youth and Sports, Sri Biren Sikder, and several other dignitaries spoke in the meetings organised by **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka** as a part of its eight-day-long Sri Ramakrishna' birthday celebrations from 20 to 27 February.

Relief

Hudhud Cyclone Relief · Andhra Pradesh: Continuing its extensive relief work among poor families affected by Hudhud cyclone, Visakhapatnam centre distributed 3,000 solar lanterns and 6,000 blankets among 3,000 families of 100 villages in Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram districts from 1 to 6 March.


Fire Relief · Uttarakhand: On 4 March, Dehradun centre handed over 14 goats to a poor shepherd belonging to Thain village in Chamoli district whose entire livestock had been destroyed in an accidental fire.

Flood Relief · Jammu & Kashmir: Srinagar centre distributed 363 kg rice, 3 kg *dal* (lentils), 8 litres of edible oil, 4.5 kg salt, 8.5 kg assorted spices, 8 kg sugar, 5 kg tea powder, and 2 utensil sets (each set containing 6 plates, 6 bowls, 6 tumblers, 1 pan, 1 pot, and 2 ladles), among 20 families in Srinagar town from 30 October to 28 February.

Winter Relief · The following centres distributed blankets to poor people: **Aalo:** 687 from 13 December to 1 February; **Darjeeling:** 70 on 30 March; **Dehradun:** 250 from 12 to 16 December; **Ichapur:** 78 from 1 to 28 February; **Lucknow:** 250 on 25 January; **Mayavati:** 300 from 10 December to 28 February; **Ootacamund:** 250 from 5 to 24 February; **Ponnampet:** 250 from 15 August to 24 December.

Distress Relief · The following centres distributed various items, mentioned against their names, to needy people: **Ichapur:** 12 children's garments and 4 adults' garments from 1 to 28 February. **Kothar:** 180 saris, 300 dhotis, and 300 chaddars from 15 November to 5 December. **Nagpur:** 125 saris, 30 chaddars, 30 towels, on 26 February.

Supply of Safe Drinking Water · Chhattisgarh: At the request of the State Government, Narainpur centre sunk 207 tube-wells from February 2014 to March 2015 in 150 remote and tribal villages of Abujmahar where there was an outbreak of diarrhoea caused by drinking contaminated water.

Economic Rehabilitation · Guwahati centre handed over 4 sewing machines to poor and needy people on 1 March. 

Correction · February 2015, p. 210: Read 'Das Narendranath' instead of 'Dutt Narendranath' in the caption of the image.

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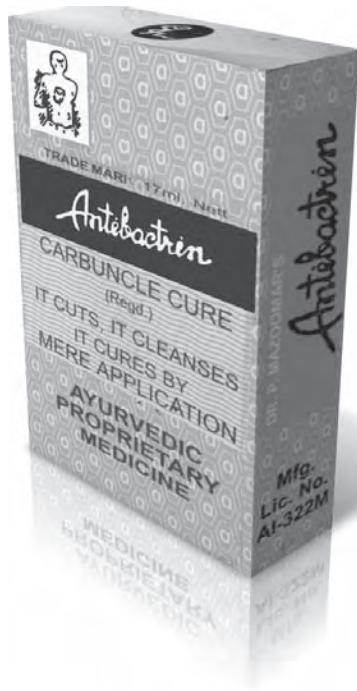
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Swami Trigunatitanandaji's
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Appeal

Ramakrishna Math, Naora is a branch centre of Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, West Bengal. Naora is a village situated at Bhangar block of South 24 Paraganas District. It became a blessed hamlet with the birth of Swami Trigunatitanandaji Maharaj, the direct monastic disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna.



Ramakrishna Math, Naora

Since its very inception, the centre has been carrying on various welfare service activities like free coaching, non-formal schools, distress relief, child welfare, and medical services for the upliftment of the poor and backward communities. Since this year is the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Trigunatitanandaji Maharaj, we would like to conduct year long (2014-2015) service activities for the benefit of the poor and needy in and around the Bhangar block of South 24 Paraganas District.

In view of the financial constraints we fervently appeal to the generous public and well wishers to donate liberally for the success of our year long welfare activities.

All donations are exempt from income tax under section 80G Cheque or Demand Draft favouring Ramakrishna Math, Naora, and may be sent to the above mentioned address. Donors can send the contributions online to Indian Overseas Bank, Bodra A/C No. 113801000010949 (IFSC: IOBA0001138), State Bank of India, Ghatakpukur A/C No. 31606923704 (IFSC: SBIN0010540).

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Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.

— Swami Vivekananda



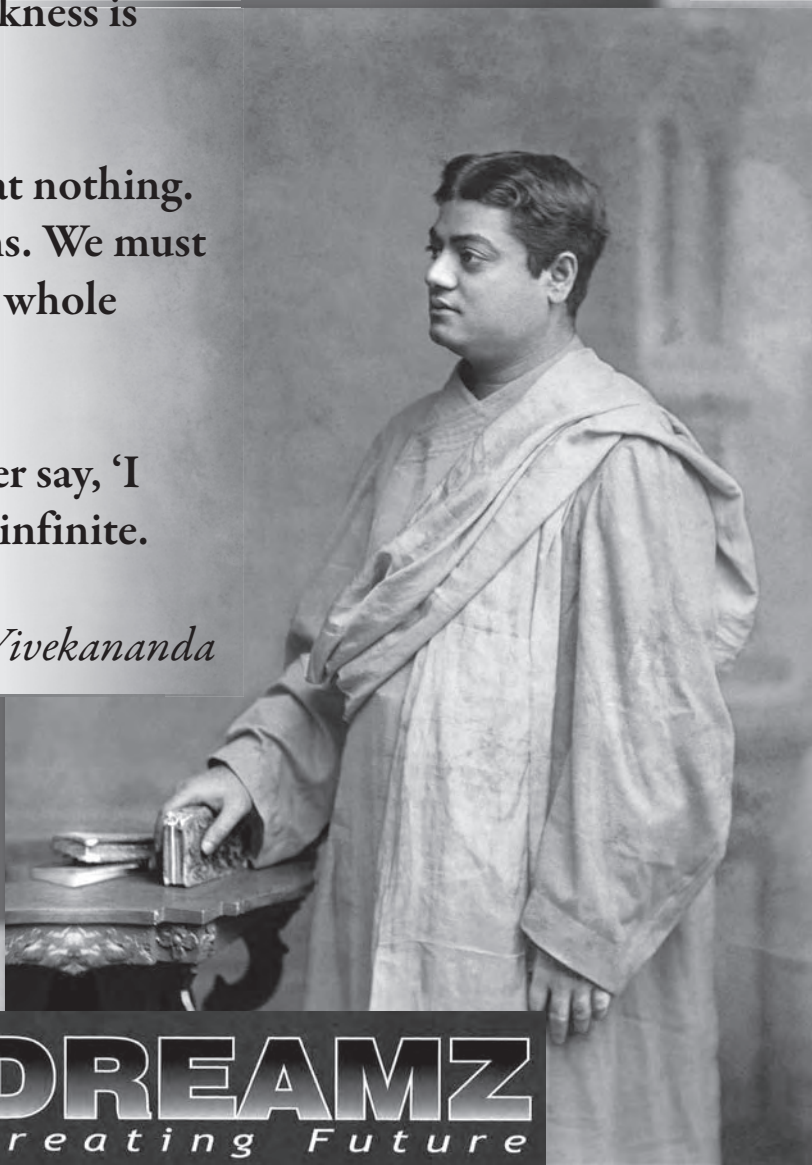
Each soul is potentially divine.
The goal is to manifest this
Divinity within.

Strength is life, weakness is
death.

Fear nothing, stop at nothing.
You will be like lions. We must
rouse India and the whole
world.

Never say, 'No', never say, 'I
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—*Swami Vivekananda*



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